

HOW ELEMENTS OF STORY ENHANCE EXPOSITORY NARRATIVE SERMONS

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ABSTRACT

The presence of stories throughout the Scriptures indicates that God uses story-telling to communicate truth. Narrative texts represent 40 – 70% of the entire Bible. This is exciting news for preachers, because we live in a culture that values stories – as seen in the number of books, movies, and television shows. Yet, the narrative sermon is not used in the pulpit ministry as frequently, or as skilfully as it could be. The purpose of this project was to develop a class in using the elements of plot to preach expository sermons of narrative Bible texts.

CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Identification of the Problem

The purpose of this thesis-project is to create a brief course in preaching expository sermons in the narrative form. This unique form has the power to reach the 21st century listener, and to touch both the intellect and the emotions. Narrative sermons, properly handled, can also accurately and forcefully interpret the meaning of a Bible text in ways that are meaningful to the listener.

When preachers open up the text of Scriptures on Sunday morning, they face 21st century audiences who are programmed to think in story. They speak to people who unknowingly get their theology from stories on HBO or MTV. Preachers can cash in on stories when they stand before their story-driven congregations. R.C. Sproul says, 'I'm big on preaching from narratives because people will listen ten times as hard to a story as they will to an abstract lesson.'¹

In spite of its value the narrative form is not being utilized as well or as often as it could. Grady Davis makes this point.

Too little use is made of narrative in contemporary preaching... The gospel itself is for the most part a simple narrative of persons, places, events, and conversations. It is not a verbal explanation of general ideas. Nine tenths of our preaching is verbal exposition and argument, but not one tenth of the Gospel is explanation. Its ideas are mainly in the form of a story told. ...Yet how few preachers trust that a good telling of the story will be preaching.²

¹Steven D. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 27.

²Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1958), 157.

The reason the narrative form is so little used is that preachers lack training in it. Until recently the form has received only cursory attention in homiletics courses. To understand a biblical text in the narrative genre, and to preach a sermon in narrative form requires a basic understanding of the literary art of narrative, but art has been considered irrelevant to preaching. Craddock observes, “Most of us give lip service to the fact that preaching is an art, as well as a science. But then we become afraid that someone will think that we speak of preaching as art as an excuse for ambiguity, sloppy thinking, and poor reasoning. ...So we disregard artistry and proceed to offer the listener an inadequate technology for framing the message.”³

Larsen concurs, and argues that the tendency of preaching is to ignore the unique treatment that narrative demands. “Our tendency is to approach and preach every passage with the same methodology. But narrative deserves and demands unique treatment. The linear, syllogistic pattern becomes imposition on such a text rather than exposition.”⁴

The lack of training devoted to the narrative sermon form hurts the pulpit ministry in two ways. First, preachers who are not trained in the narrative form use sermon forms that do not fit the narrative text. When narrative texts are preached in other forms the meaning of the text may be distorted. Craddock states that the form of the text must be considered in interpreting and preaching it or the meaning of the text is lost. “The separation of form and content is fatal for preaching, for it fails to recognize the theology implicit in the method of communication. It is a fact that much preaching contradicts by its method the content of its message.”⁵ Greidanus agrees that form can determine the

³Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 19.

⁴David Larsen, *Telling the Old, Old Story* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1995), 88.

⁵Craddock, *Preaching*, 18.

success or failure of a sermon. “An appropriate form can help get the message across as originally intended. A wrong form can undercut the message of the text.”⁶

Warren Wiersbe emphasizes the importance of preaching forms that follow the form of the biblical text. He says, “The problem is good storytellers do not convey their stories through analytical outline. To preach biblically means ... to preach the Bible accurately. It also means to present that truth the way the biblical writers presented it.”⁷

The first way that preaching has suffered is in the inaccurate interpretation of narrative biblical texts that may occur when preachers are not trained in narrative preaching. The second way preaching suffers is in the loss of a powerful communication tool.

Authors of homiletics texts agree that the narrative form has a power of its own, and that this power is lost if the text is preached in a typical lecture style sermon.

Davis states that the narrative form does something that no mere explanation of ideas can – it communicates meaning in the context of actual life experience “We overestimate the power of assertion and underestimate the power of narrative to communicate meaning and to influence lives of people. No assertion about life has as much power as life itself has when shown to people. ... A good telling of the biblical story can be better than the best exposition of general ideas of which the preacher is capable.”⁸

⁶Sydney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 16.

⁷Mathewson, *Art of Preaching*, 27.

⁸Davis, *Design*, 158.

The common approach has been to preach narrative texts using a linear, analytical sermon form. Lowery says this forfeits the “sense of life” that is in every biblical story.

Much modern preaching tends to explain the narrative text along strictly intellectual lines. However, part of the power of the narrative is intrinsic to its form, and this power, this sense of life, is lost when the structure is neglected. The text is forced out of its natural shape... into a three-point discussion of ideas inferred from the text. The result is that the most important features of the text, its natural movement and main theme, are misunderstood.⁹

The scholars of homiletics agree that preaching classes have tended to focus on intellectual analysis of biblical texts, and have not addressed the unique aspects of narrative sermons. The result is that the benefits of narrative preaching have largely been lost.

Purpose of the Thesis Project

Further training in elements of story is needed to promote the use of narrative preaching. Larsen tells of the need he discovered to use narrative. “In teaching homiletics for many years I have used an essentially didactic or epistolary model for neophyte preachers. The impact of contemporary discussion has compelled me to use also a narrative model.”¹⁰

The purpose of this thesis-project is to create a course in expository narrative preaching. Pastors receive basic training in preaching and in hermeneutics, and do not need an entire menu of preaching instruction. They could achieve a basic, working knowledge of narrative preaching through a brief course, such as a conference setting affords. A brief course would be sufficient to define the elements of story, and

⁹Eugene Lowery, *The Homiletical Plot* (Louisville: Westminster John Know Press, 2001), 56.

¹⁰Larsen, *Telling the Old*, , 88.

demonstrate how they work in preaching. Teachers of homiletics have recognized the need for more instruction on narrative preaching, and many good resources are available for use in a course, or by an individual seeking to increase their skill.

The course is intended to provide pastors with basic training in the narrative form. The target audience is pastors who may see the need for narrative sermons, but who do not have the time for or access to typical classroom training. To meet the needs of these pastors, the course is four hours, and is designed as a continuing education seminar for use in conferences, denominational events, or any setting where ministers may gather as part of their work.

It is the intent of the course that participants will take home insights and experiences that they can practice and develop by practicing them as part of their regular routine of sermon preparation.

Chapter Two, “Theological Foundations”, will explore theological principles that guide the course. Chapter Three, “Theoretical Rationale for the Course” reviews literature from the fields of homiletics and literary art to show how and why the elements of story are important to preaching. Chapter Four, “Content of the Course” includes the instructional outcomes of the course and lesson plans. Chapter Five is an evaluation of the teaching experience, including suggested changes.

Scope

The course is designed for preachers who hold an orthodox theology, and who have a commitment to expository preaching. It is assumed that participants in the course have

a working knowledge of hermeneutics, and in the basics of expository preaching principles.

Definition of Terms

Narrative

The term “Narrative” refers to “A story, either fiction or non fiction.”¹¹ Story has been defined as “a sequence of events or images that employs plot, character and emotion. Plot gives it direction (and movement); character gives it humanity; and emotion gives it people in relationship.”¹²

Narrative sermon form

While many forms of sermons include stories, the phrase “narrative sermon” will be defined as a sermon in the structure of a story. The structure of the sermon follows the successive points of plot. As a plot, the sermon begins with a setting, then moves through conflict, suspense, and climax toward a conclusion. “The narrative sermon, rather than containing stories, is a story from outset to conclusion.”¹³

Narrative biblical text

A narrative biblical text is a Bible passage in the narrative genre. This includes parables, historical events, and Biblical accounts of events. Narrative texts may also be fictional literary devices such as parables, whose events and characters are fictional, but

¹¹Torrey Robinson and Haddon Robinson, *It's All in How You Tell It* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 15.

¹²Richard A. Jensen, *Thinking in Story-Preaching in a Post-Literate Age* (Lima, Ohio: CSS Publishing, 1993), 89.

¹³Calvin Miller, *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duduit, Editor (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 105.

communicate a Bible truth. A narrative text is an entire unit of thought. Mathewson describes a unit of thought as, "...a whole story. The limits of a story, where it begins and ends, are determined primarily by analyzing the plot. Stories typically contain exposition a crisis, a resolution, and a conclusion."¹⁴

Plot

The internally consistent, interrelated pattern of events that move through time to shape and design a story. Plot is the writer's choice of events and their design in time. All plots have one purpose: to put the characters in motion through arranging the events, emotions, etc. so the reader can follow them, and desires to follow them to a convincing, meaningful end They involve us in the fate of the characters because the elements that make up the plot (the events in the lives of the characters) connect the character to our world.¹⁵

Plot includes some form of organization of the story in this general pattern:

1. A conflict or conflicts
2. Complication of those conflicts (suspense)
3. A resolution of the conflict

¹⁴Mathewson, *Art of Preaching*, 24.

¹⁵Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and Principles of Screenwriting* (New York, NY: Regan Books, 1997), 40.

CHAPTER II

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the theological foundations for this thesis-project, a course in narrative preaching. This course was designed for preachers who hold an orthodox view of the Scriptures. The course teaches the art of story, as part of understanding and preaching the narrative text.

This chapter looks at the theological issues related to this course in narrative preaching. Section I, “A Summary of the Orthodox View of Scripture”, will explain the theology of Scripture held by the author.

Section II, “How the Doctrine of Inspiration Supports Narrative Preaching”, explores the human authorship of Scripture and God’s use of literary art in the process of inspiration. Section III, “Theological Perspectives on Imagination in Sermon Preparation”, applies theological principles to determine whether imagination is useful in exegesis, sermon preparation, or both.

Section IV, “Subjective Theology: A Caution for Narrative Preaching”, contrasts the subjective, experience oriented neo-orthodox approach to Scripture with the objective, doctrine-based perspective of orthodoxy.

A Summary of the Orthodox View of Scripture

The orthodox view of Scripture is based on the doctrines of revelation, inspiration, and the authority of Scripture.

The Doctrine of Revelation

The doctrine of revelation refers to God's disclosure of His nature and His will to humankind. For the purposes of this section, the special revelation of God in the Scripture is the focus. There are five themes in the doctrine of revelation.

First, the doctrine of revelation states that God has communicated His word to humankind. "Revelation means 'unveiling and describes the disclosure of truth from God to mankind'"¹

Second, God's revelation resulted in a written record, the Bible. "The words 'revelation' and 'reveal' imply an unveiling, a coming into view. It is reasonable to suppose that God would speak to His creatures whom He has made quite capable of such communion. One way God does so is through the Bible."²

Third, God revealed information that mankind could not discoverable by human effort. "God disclosed truth that man could not otherwise know. Man would never know God's truth by intellectual attempts to discover God. It is not surprising. God and man are very different beings. God is unlimited in His power and knowledge...God is known by man because He has made Himself known to man."³

Fourth, the Bible is reliable in all it reveals. "The Bible claims to be and is, the written word of God (2 Timothy 3:16). It treats faithfully and truthfully of things in heaven and on earth."⁴

Fifth, God's purpose in revelation was relationship with mankind. "Revelation is

¹Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), 64.

²Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1969), 91.

³Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 42.

⁴Chafer, *Systematic*, 21.

God's manifestation of Himself to particular persons at definite times and places, enabling those persons to enter into a redemptive relationship with Him.”⁵

In summary, the doctrine of revelation states that the Bible is God's disclosure of Himself and His word to humankind. The matter of how God accomplished His revelation is addressed in the doctrine of inspiration.

The Doctrine of the Inspiration of Scripture

Scripture states that God expressed His word to human authors, and guided them to write His word. “As applied to Scripture, the term “inspiration” means “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16-17) and more particularly that the words of Holy Writ are derived from God...Scripture did not originate with man but with God.... The Bible authors were moved or borne along like a ship by the wind.”⁶

The effect of God's guidance of the human authors was that the words they wrote accurately expressed His word. “The Bible claims to be a book from God, a message with divine authority, that the biblical writers were moved by the Holy Spirit to utter His very words – so that their message came by revelation so that what they wrote was breathed out (inspired) by God Himself.”⁷

Divine inspiration ensures the reliability of Scripture. God inspired the very words of Scripture, so they are true and without error. This is the Verbal Plenary view, and the Moody Handbook of Theology defines it as follows. “Verbal Plenary Inspiration means

⁵Erickson, *Christian*, 201.

⁶Chafer, *Systematic*, 202.

⁷Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume One* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House, 2002), 235.

inspiration extends to the actual words and to every part of the Bible. In traditional usage of the term Verbal Plenary Inspiration was equated with inerrancy...Since the Scriptures are given by God they are free from error in all their contents.”⁸

The biblical writers understood that what they wrote was not from their own insight. Multiple biblical examples illustrate that the human authors of Scripture understood that what they wrote was from God.

David testified on his deathbed, “The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; His word was on my tongue”. (2 Samuel 23:2) Peter referred to this thought saying, “God...who spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David... (Acts 4:24-25). Hebrews states, “He (God) spoke through David as was said before”. Peter referred to Paul’s epistles as Scripture. “Our dear brother Paul wrote to you with the wisdom God gave him... His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort as they do the other Scriptures.” (2 Peter 3:15, 16). In I Timothy 5:18 Paul cites the Gospel of Matthew as Scripture along with the Old Testament effectively declaring that what Matthew wrote was Scripture. He drew a parallel between, “Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading the grain.” (Deuteronomy 25:4) and “The workman is worthy of his wages”. (I Timothy 5:18)⁹

Since the Bible is God’s word accurately written, then it carries the authority of God.

The Doctrine of the Authority of Scripture

Erickson defines authority in relation to the Bible as follows: “Authority, in general, is the right to command belief or action. Authority may be accepted or rejected, but it is based upon right and power. In the ultimate analysis, of course, God Himself is the authority in belief and conduct...As Almighty Creator He has the right to prescribe

⁸Enns, *Moody Handbook*, 638.

⁹Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 417.

what His creatures ought to believe and what they ought to do.”¹⁰ Chafer’s explanation is similar. “By right of creation- the most absolute of all prerogatives-comes the ground of divine authority. To the Originator, the Designer, and the Executor of all that exists becomes at once the basis for transcendent, peerless, and incomparable authority...reflecting the supreme authority of God as actually His revealed will, the Word of Truth is to obeyed by all.”¹¹

Why is the authority of the Scriptures so important? The Christian faith calls for complete trust in and obedience to the Scriptures as the one true standard of behavior and the source of truth. No mere human doctrine could deserve such trust and loyalty. “The authority of the Scriptures depends on their origin. Just because they are from God, they must be authentic and divine. Thus, Christians should consider as an incontrovertible truth the fact that the Scriptures are inspired by God as the primary foundation of faith.”¹²

The doctrine of authority means that the Bible is divine in origin and accurate in the declaration of God’s will. For this reason, it is the ultimate authority for faith and practice.

These three doctrines together- the revelation, inspiration, and authority of Scripture- are the foundation of the orthodox view of Scripture. The following section of this chapter will take a closer look at the doctrine of inspiration to show that orthodox theology actually supports narrative preaching.

¹⁰Millard Erickson, *The New Evangelical Theology* (Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1968), 48.

¹¹Chafer, *Systematic*, 29.

¹²Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 410.

How the Doctrine of Inspiration Supports Narrative Preaching

The literature on inspiration indicates that the human authors of Scripture used the forms and techniques of literary art. God did not squelch human personality but used the work of human authors for His purposes in the inspiration of Scripture. As a result a significant portion of the Bible is in the narrative genre. Since the Scriptures were given in various literary forms, including narrative, preachers should understand these forms and consider using them in preaching. The concept referred to as dual authorship is helpful. What is dual authorship? Borden summarizes, “The historical, orthodox position on inspiration holds that God and humans were both extensively and equally involved in the production of Scripture.”¹³ Chafer explains that both divine and human authorship were involved in inspiration.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 declares that the words of Holy Writ are derived from God...Scripture did not originate with man but with God. 2 Peter 1:21 has to do with the counterpart to this divine work respecting human reception of the God-directed words. The Bible authors were moved or borne along like a ship by the wind. The Bible is, therefore, to a certain degree a dual authorship from both the Holy Spirit and its human authors.¹⁴

To what extent were the human authors involved in writing Scripture? Their role went well beyond writing down what God told them, and included the use of their ability as communicators. Referring to the process of inspiration Geisler states, “The simple fact

¹³Paul Borden, *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, Michael Duduit, Editor (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 598.

*In defining dual authorship above, Borden stated that human authors were “equally involved”. This does not mean that the human authors were equal in the sense that their contributions were as important as God’s, or that they were in nature or position the same as God in terms of being the originator of the Scriptures. Making the human authors equal in this sense would be in contradiction to the statement of God as the origin of the scriptures as stated in the doctrine of inspiration. God is the author, He inspired the words, and He guided the human authors. “Equally involved” here can only mean that both God and man were fully engaged within their unique roles in the process of inspiration.

¹⁴Chafer, *Systematic*, 202.

of the matter is that not only is the Bible a human book, but it also reflects different degrees of human ability and training in the various languages in which it was written.”¹⁵

Clearly, human authorship is part of the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. Human authorship includes literary art, so it would be reasonable to infer that the study of literary art should be part of biblical interpretation. Geisler argues that the human aspect has been overlooked. “Conservatives tend to deny or diminish the human origin of Scripture while affirming the divine.”¹⁶

A closer look at the human aspect of the origin of Scripture reveals that orthodox theology affirms that literary art is part of Scripture. First, the personalities and emotion of the human authors are evident in Scripture. “The writers of Scripture were not passive androids; they were real human beings, and their emotion is expressed in their books. Paul expresses great anger over Israel (Romans 9:2). He also expressed anger over the Galatians (Galatians 3:1). Melancholy and loneliness are manifest in his later prison days (2 Timothy 4:9-16); joy in passages like Philippians 1:4.”¹⁷ According to the doctrine of inspiration, God does not override human personality or literary styles. The Chicago Conference on Biblical Inerrancy states, “We affirm that God, in His work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared. We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities”.¹⁸ Human emotion is the crucible in which art is fired. As God allowed personality and emotion to come through in the writing of

¹⁵Geisler, 420.

¹⁶Ibid, 421.

¹⁷Ibid, 253.

¹⁸Ibid, 420

Scripture, He allowed literary art also. Second, there is evidence in Scripture that literary art was part of the process of inspiration:

Judging by the various vocabulary, grammar, styles, figures of speech, and human interests of the various authors, God did not disregard the personalities and culture of the biblical writers. In the process of inspiration human authors exercised freedom, employed literary skill, communicated in the language and culture they in which they lived, and literary style to faithfully communicate God's message.¹⁹

Human writers of Scripture were not secretaries taking notes, but skilled, dedicated authors, practicing their art under God's direction. In describing the orthodox view of the human aspect of dual authorship, Geisler uses terms from literary art. He refers to four actual components of literature found in Scripture: vocabulary, grammar, style, and figures of speech. He also observes four elements of the human psyche, which are the foundation and context of all human artistic expression: personality, culture, freedom, and human interests

Perhaps Geisler's most striking observation is that God gave human writers freedom in their work. Freedom in the context of writing means artistic freedom – the freedom to choose the form, and the style. The orthodox concept of dual authorship of Scripture supports the study of literary art forms and techniques because it shows that literary art is part of the process of inspiration and of the Bible itself. This course was created based on the logic that if preaching is to be consistent with orthodox theology, then the literary forms must be considered in the interpretation of narrative texts, and the narrative form must be respected in shaping the sermon.

The fact that human authors were so involved in composing the Scriptures raises a question. It has been stated above that the inerrancy and the authority of Scripture is

¹⁹Ibid, 253

dependent upon their divine authorship. If God allowed human authors to exercise freedom, express emotion, and use literary methods, then how can the Scriptures still be divine?

Geisler contends that the extensive involvement of the human authors does not diminish the divine nature and origin of the Scripture. He explains that God was able, in the process of inspiration of Scripture to perfectly balance the divine and the human. “He providentially guided them to be the vehicle through which He revealed His written word to mankind. God was able to make His word certain without destroying the freedom and personalities of the authors.”²⁰

In summary, it is clear that human authors were actively engaged in the process of inspiration, and that they employed the forms of literary art, including narrative.

Speaking of dual authorship Borden concludes that literary art is integral to preaching narrative texts, and that to overlook this is to misuse the text.

This means that when God chose to reveal truth through narratives He chose highly skilled storytellers. These individuals developed this form of literature artfully and skillfully. The result for preaching of making this assumption that God elected skilled storytellers is that we interpreters cannot violate the essence of good narratives when exegeting the text.²¹

Based upon dual authorship, and upon the presence of literary art in the Scriptures and in the process of inspiration, training preachers in literary art would seem reasonable, even necessary to interpretation of biblical texts. God used human emotion, skill, and literary style in the inspiration of Scripture. It would follow that those who believe in orthodox theology should take the study of literary art seriously as part of the preparation

²⁰Ibid, 234.

²¹Borden, *Contemporary*, 598.

of narrative sermons.

Theological Perspectives on the Role of Imagination in Preaching

Narrative preaching involves imagination. In this way preparing a narrative sermon is similar to writing any kind of story. But how should imagination be used in preaching? Among conservatives, there are two main opinions on the matter.

Some believe that imagination can be used to shape the sermon, but not to interpret the text. In this case the concern is that using imagination usurps the author's intended meaning of the text.

David Larsen limits imagination to writing the sermon only. "The role of imagination is not so much in the interpretation of the text but in developing the structure for communicating the meaning of the text... Placing interpretation itself in the imagination is to abandon the text."²²

Wilhite and Gibson agree.

While showing us positively how biblical writers used various rhetorical shapes to communicate their message, Thomas Long's *Preaching the Literary Forms of the Bible* is undercut by his radical notion that Scripture is interpreted in our imagination, thus losing all hermeneutical control. Theologically we have seen the role of imagination in relation to developing the communication of the interpreted text, not in formulating the interpretation.²³

Others argue that there is a legitimate use for imagination in interpretation. They believe that imagination can be a tool for the interpretation of the text, without abandoning sound hermeneutics. Borden says it succinctly, "Biblical writers expect the reader to use imagination in reading the text because they used imagination when they

²²Larsen, *Telling the Old*, 32.

²³Keith Wilhite and Scott Gibson, *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1999), 15.

wrote them.”²⁴

Haddon Robinson gives imagination a significant role in both the interpretation of the narrative text and in the shaping of the sermon.

We are accustomed to using our intellectual faculties to analyze. That’s what we have been trained to do. Narrative says ‘No, you have to look at that text and use your imagination. Look at what’s in the text, and then look one step beyond it at what was taking place. Even if you are doing an Epistle, and you have Paul writing to the Galatians, if you can imagine Paul writing, and you can understand why he is so angry when he begins to write that book. Or imagine it from the point of view of the person who reads it. You can get those clues from the text – but you have to go one step beyond the clue and your imagination helps you in preparation.’²⁵

This writer’s conclusion of the question is that imagination could have a role in both interpretation and sermon writing, provided that imagination is used without violating sound hermeneutical principles.

These three sections have presented theological foundations upon which the course was built, and offered principles for preachers to embrace and to apply. The next section turns to a theological perspective to avoid.

Subjective Theology: A Caution for Narrative Preaching

To be consistent with orthodox theology narrative sermons must communicate the main idea of the biblical text. There is a danger that is unique to narrative preaching.

The narrative sermon form is vulnerable to distortion. Narrative sermons and homiletics books about narrative preaching sometimes give the impression that doctrine is not important when preaching in story-telling form. Some “story sermons” get high marks for entertainment value, but fail miserably in communicating the main idea of the

²⁴Borden, *Contemporary*, 596.

²⁵Haddon Robinson, “Narrative Preaching”, *Pulpit Talk* 1, no. 3 (2003), [CD ROM].

biblical text. What makes the narrative form vulnerable to this kind of mishandling?

Scholars of literature explain that the story makes its point indirectly, through the actions of the characters. Though stated indirectly, the story has a message for the reader to discover. Narrative biblical texts make their point in the same way. The author's intended meaning may not be obvious or directly stated in the biblical text, but it is there, and the preacher is responsible to discover that meaning through study of the text. The preacher is also responsible to make certain that the narrative sermon communicates that main idea. It is not easy to integrate the art of story and the science of exegesis, but that is the responsibility of narrative preaching.

This section will address two basic theological perspectives on religion and Scripture. First is the subjective, experience-based perspective. The second is the objective, doctrine-based perspective. Preachers need to understand that both are represented in the literature of narrative preaching, but the theology underlying each is not often explained. One perspective supports the exposition of narrative biblical texts. The other undermines exposition and promotes sermons without biblical content. The danger is that, in the process of culling homiletical insights on narrative preaching, the preacher may produce sermons that are influenced by unbiblical theological perspectives behind those insights.

The purpose of this section is to explain each of these perspectives – the subjective and the objective, and so further define the theological foundations of the course. The term “subjective” as used here refers to any view in which religion is a matter of personal feelings, originating in the mind.

The dictionary definition is, “The philosophic theory that all knowledge is relative, never objective. It is determined by the feelings and derived from the mind... It

originates with the mind and, hence, is incapable of being checked or verified externally.²⁶

Subjective theologies are those which hold that the meaning of Scripture is whatever the individual thinks it is. Like other subjective worldviews, subjective theologies, "...consider the supreme good to be some sort of feeling, usually of pleasure."²⁷ One example of a subjective theology is neo-orthodoxy, and it is used here to illustrate the kind of subjective views of Scripture that is represented in some homiletical literature.

The word "objective" is defined as "Being independent of the mind, real, actual."²⁸ Orthodoxy holds that Scripture is objective truth. The Bible is God's word, His revelation of reality, and that reality exists independently of the mind. The Bible is objective truth because it is actual, real truth, unchanged by the feelings of the reader. In contrast to subjectivism, the objective view of Scripture means that the Bible is the authority, the external standard by which religion can be verified or checked.

Subjective theology makes religion entirely a matter of feelings. "The locus of religion is in the self. Religion is found in feeling. Doctrine is only a form of the faith. Religions are neither true nor false. Truth or falsity does not apply to religion, because religion is a feeling."²⁹

Feeling-based religion makes an existential experience of God the only goal, and denies the supernatural nature and divine authority of Scripture. Feeling is equal to spiritual experience. Personal experience with God is divorced from any thought or

²⁶Miriam-Webster Dictionary, 1452.

²⁷Ibid, 1452.

²⁸Ibid. 1012.

²⁹Erickson, *New Evangelical*, 219.

objective truth. “Revelation is not the communication of information from God to man, but only a personal presentation of Himself. Kierkegaard said ‘God does not tell us anything about Himself. We simply know Him in the encounter.’”³⁰

Neo-orthodoxy states that the encounter is the goal of religion, and that logic, doctrine or any objective truth is contradictory to the genuine encounter with God. In subjective theologies, such as neo-orthodoxy, the Bible is not considered God’s word

The neo-orthodox view emphasizes that the Bible is not exactly equalled to the word of God because God does not speak in mere propositions. God does not reveal mere facts about Himself. He reveals Himself. The Bible is not the substance of the word of God, but rather a witness to the word of God. It becomes the word of God as the reader encounters Christ in his own subjective experience.³¹

The Bible is considered to be of human origin and therefore unreliable. This view of the Bible is based on theories of inspiration in which the Bible is a mere human document. Natural Inspiration says, “Inspiration is merely a superior insight on the part of natural man. It is merely the intensifying and elevating of the religious perception of the writer.”³² In this theory the Bible is not divine revelation. “There is nothing supernatural about the Bible. The authors wrote with human insight and skill as other authors.”³³ Intuition Theory of Inspiration offers a similar view. “Some liberals hold that inspiration is the functioning of a high gift, perhaps almost like an artistic ability but nonetheless a natural endowment. The Scripture writers were no different from other great religious thinkers, such as Plato and Buddha.”³⁴

³⁰Ibid, 217.

³¹Ibid, 218

³²Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 63.

³³Enns, *Moody Handbook*, 638.

³⁴Ibid, 639.

Conceptual Inspiration is based on the opinion that anything involving human participation must always be flawed. “Concepts or ideas of the biblical writers are inspired but not the words of Scripture. God gave the concepts to the writers who wrote in their own words; hence there may be errors on Scripture, because the choice of words was left to the writers, and not superintended by God.”³⁵

None of these theories is consistent with the biblical explanation of inspiration. In neo-orthodoxy “God revealed Himself in His mighty acts, not in words. The words of Scripture are human understanding of the significance of God’s actions.”³⁶ As a human book, the Bible is considered corrupted by the primitive conceptions of the authors of Scripture. The stories contained in this flawed Bible are considered myths. They are useful only for facilitating a personal encounter with God, therefore the purpose of the preacher is to remove the myth (the content) so the listener can encounter God in whatever way they feel at the time. In the subjective view, biblical interpretation is not the discovery the author-intended meaning imbedded in the text, but the creation of meaning in the reader’s imagination.

One neoorthodox scholar, in the introduction to his book on preaching states, “Our book understands interpretation to hinge crucially upon the reader. Meaning is not something ‘out there’ in the text waiting to be discovered. Meaning is always, in the last analysis, the reader’s creation, and readers, like texts, come in an infinite variety.”³⁷ If meaning is entirely dependent upon the reader then Bible content is unimportant. Enns concludes,

³⁵Ibid, 637.

³⁶Erickson, *New Evangelical*, 217.

³⁷Mathewson, *Art of Preaching*, 24.

Whether Christ actually rose from the dead in time and space is unimportant. The important thing is the experiential encounter that is possible in spite of the errors...” This eliminates the possibility that the Bible has divine authority. “There is no external authority (including Scripture) that takes precedence over the immediate experience of believers. This is subjectivism with its emphasis on experience rather than objective doctrine. Objective, doctrinal truth is absent.”³⁸

A subjective, experiential theology makes the self the author and standard of truth, and narrative sermons are empty of meaning. The preacher should exercise discernment in handling a creative mode of communication, such as the narrative sermon form. The following principles illustrate the objective nature of orthodox theology of Scripture, and its importance for preaching.

Orthodox theology presents a view of Scripture that preserves the objectivity of biblical truth while it promotes a personal relationship with God. In response to the neo-orthodox statement, “God does not reveal mere facts about Himself” orthodox theologians reply, “While revelation makes possible an encounter with God, it mainly identifies God’s revelation with words of Scripture. God has revealed facts. He has told us some things.”³⁹

Words matter in orthodox theology, because God used words to reveal Himself and His will. Objective truth does not mean the absence of personal interaction with God, but the foundation for such interaction with God. The orthodox view of Scripture drives the purpose of preaching – to interpret the content of Scripture so that divinely revealed truth may be understood and embraced by the listener, which results in worship, a genuine encounter with God. Larsen argues that objective truth should not, and need not be

³⁸Enns, *Moody Handbook*, 162.

³⁹Gordon Clark, *Fundamentals of the Faith*, ed. Carl Henry (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 1969), 20.

sacrificed for personal experience. He says, “We want to maintain both propositional revelation and personal encounter.”⁴⁰

Subjective views of Scripture say that the Bible is a human document, full of errors in primitive conceptions of God, resulting in mere myths. Orthodox theology responds,

We affirm that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His word. The origin of Scripture is divine. The mode of inspiration remains largely a mystery to us. We deny that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.⁴¹

The current climate of enthusiasm for narrative preaching has resulted in a growing body of work for preachers interested in developing their skill in this effective form. The danger for narrative preaching is the subjective theology behind some homiletical books and some attitudes of those who preach narrative sermons. The narrative sermon form is vulnerable to misuse. For a narrative sermon to be the exposition of truth it must not be all emotion and no doctrinal content. All sermons should communicate the timeless theological truth of the original meaning of the text. The danger in narrative preaching is that the form is subject to misuse by preachers who do not have or work within an orthodox view of the Scripture. This course in the narrative sermon incorporates literary art, and contains subjective elements, as does any kind of art instruction. However, this course is also based upon a high view of Scripture, and therefore this course teaches faithful interpretation of the divine text. Preachers should be aware of the two different perspectives and the theologies upon which each rest, and avoid subjectivism in theology and in the practice of preaching.

⁴⁰Larsen, *Telling the Old*, 22.

⁴¹Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 419.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL RATIONALE

The purpose of this thesis-project is to develop a course in expository preaching in the narrative homiletical form. The course will instruct the students in the basic concepts of story, and their use in preaching. These concepts include plot, setting, conflict, tension, climax, and conclusion. The theory of this course is that the techniques and concepts used in story writing can help preachers prepare effective narrative sermons. The purpose of this chapter is to review literature from the fields of homiletics and of literary art to answer questions in two areas relevant to the course.

First, what is expository narrative preaching? Can a sermon preached in the form of a story communicate doctrine and lead the hearer to the main idea of the text? Second, is there a body of work in homiletics that is sufficiently developed to provide a basis for a course in literary art in preaching? Might elements of story from the literature of story writing be useful for a course on narrative preaching?

Part One: What is Expository Narrative Preaching?

The literature on narrative preaching reflects a wide variety of views of preaching in the narrative form, and not all are expository. Some scholars see story-sermons as inspirational stories, more concerned with entertainment than exposition of a biblical text. Others describe the narrative sermon as an important sermon form concerned with accurate preaching of the text and powerful connection with the listener. To provide a well-rounded definition of the phrase “expository narrative preaching”, each word is defined individually here.

The term “expository” refers to, “preaching which confronts the hearers with an accurate interpretation of the Biblical revelation and its present meaning for their lives”.¹ According to Olford and Olford, the concept of exposition of Bible texts is found in I Timothy 4.

I Timothy 4:13 Paul’s instructions to Timothy were to “give attention to ...*exposition* of the word, rightly dividing the word of truth.” “Rightly dividing” is a definition of expository preaching. While difficult to translate into English, it essentially means declaring the word of God without distortion, rightly administering the word of truth, giving the truth a right of way. This renders the verb as “the skilful application of the parts or aspects of truth adapted to affect persons especially in need of instruction.”²

Robinson contends that expository preaching begins with the attitude of the preacher toward the Scripture. “The purpose of expository preaching is to present the message of units of God’s word to His people. Bible expositors ...do not come to their Bible to argue, to prove a point, or even to find a sermon. They read to understand and to experience what they understand.”³ Our responsibility as expositors is to open it up in such a way that it speaks its message clearly.⁴

Expository preaching is not a style or set of rules regarding form. It is better described as a set of principles that guide the process of sermon preparation. Properly speaking, ‘exposition’ ...refers to the content of the sermon (biblical truth), rather than to style (a running commentary). Expository preaching is not a style or form. It is bringing out what is in the text and exposing it to view. The text could be a verse... or an entire book, a sentence or a single word. What matters most is what we do with it.

¹Robinson and Robinson, *How You Tell It*, 8.

²Stephen Olford and David L. Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 38.

³Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002), 22.

⁴Olford and Olford, *Anointed*, 38.

Part Two: The Literature of Homiletics on Literary Art

The term “narrative” refers to “A story, either fiction or non fiction⁵”. Story has been defined as, “a sequence of events or images that employs plot, character and emotion. Plot gives it direction (and movement); character gives it humanity; and emotion gives it people in relationship.”⁶

Narrative may also refer to a sermon form. While many sermons contain stories, the phrase “narrative sermon” -for the purposes of this thesis-project - will be defined as a sermon that has the elements of a story, (plot, conflict, character, and setting, for example) and is structured as a story. “The narrative sermon, rather than containing stories, is a story from outset to conclusion.”⁷

The narrative sermon form is designed to involve the listener as a whole person with the text being preached. “The story is the preaching itself. The thoughts, emotions, and ideas of the story create an experience. The experience of hearing the story is the sermon. The aim of the sermon is the participation and involvement of the listener in the gospel story”.⁸

What makes the story so valuable to the listener? Narrative appeals to the aspirations and felt needs of the listener. “A story is a narrative of events which are consequential to the listener, involving human characters that are worthy of our attention and who change”.⁹

⁶Robinson and Robinson, *How You Tell It*, 8.

⁶Jensen, *Thinking in Story*, 89.

⁷Miller, *Handbook*, 105.

⁸Jensen, *Thinking in Story*, 126.

⁹Joseph Navakovich, *Fiction Writer's Workshop* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Story Press, 1995), 68.

People are drawn to story as a way to cope with the deep trials and troubling questions of life. “The value of story over raw experience is that it imposes a pattern, a meaning upon life. Life is frustrating, chaotic, illogical, and full of useless suffering and pain. Story gives a perspective, a sense of order, with which the listener can begin to face the challenges and gain some sense of hope.”¹⁰

Unlike other sermon forms, narratives communicate the idea indirectly. Kaiser explains that the writers of biblical stories made their point indirectly through the actions and words of characters, and through God’s words and reactions to those characters.¹¹ Robinson emphasizes that such indirect communication is an essential part of narratives. “Narratives are most effective when the audience hears the story and arrives at the speaker’s ideas without the ideas being stated directly...the story should unfold so that listeners identify with the thoughts, motives, reactions, and rationalizations of the biblical

The recent homiletic literature on preaching narrative sermons has often focused on preaching a story in the first person. “A first-person narrative sermon does the retelling of the scriptural account from the point of a view of a character who was part of the story.”¹² However, the story can also be told in the third-person, in which the narrator is not part of the story being told. For example, in his Gospel, Luke gives a third person narrative account of the life of Jesus.¹³

When the term “narrative” refers to a Bible text it means that the text belongs to a specific genre of scripture. Robinson states, “Genre is the specific type, or classification

¹⁰James N. Frey, *How to Write a Good Novel* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 50.

¹¹Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 199.

¹²Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 133.

¹³*Ibid*, 128.

of the literary work, such as prose, poetry, or narrative.”¹⁴

Ryken identifies three leading traits of the narrative genre.

1. Narrative images reality – The most obvious feature of literature is its subject matter. It prefers the concrete to the abstract. The subject of literature is not abstract information but human experience. Storytellers follow the same impulse to present human experience rather than to tell about it. They do so with such techniques as description, dialogue, and the actions of characters. We tell a text is literary by its tendency to incarnate ideas into the form of ...stories of characters in action, and situations in which readers can imaginatively participate...Literature appeals to our understanding through imagination.

2. Artistry –Literature is an art form characterized by beauty, craftsmanship, and technique. The elements of artistic form that all arts share include pattern or design, theme or central focus, organic unity, coherence, balance, contrast, symmetry, repetition or recurrence, and unified progression.

3. Brevity and plain style- Biblical storytellers show a remarkable preference for the brief unit. Whereas (secular) storytellers elaborate the details of a story, the storytellers of the Bible give only the essentials and leave much unstated. The effect of its unembellished storytelling is that the stories require subtle investigation and interpretation.¹⁵

Fokkelman insists that writers of inspired Scripture used the techniques of literary art. They made choices about the structure they gave to the stories. They made decisions about style and content. He concludes that the study of narrative texts requires that the reader apply the rules and methods of narrative art to understand the text. “What we have to learn is to read these stories according to their own rules and conventions, in an attitude of respect, and maintaining an open mind as long as possible¹⁶.

Homiletic scholars are consistent in their view that the narrative text should be studied and preached giving due consideration to the importance of literary art.

¹⁴Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 8.

¹⁵Ibid, 26.

¹⁶Ibid, 19.

Eslinger believes there is growing interest in the power of the narrative form. “There is a keen attentiveness to sermonic form out of a new respect for the variety of shapes Scripture takes and out of a concern that the form will capture the interest and attention of the congregation.”¹⁷

Jensen voices a conviction that is common among scholars, that the literary form of the text must be respected in the sermon. “The biblical text is treated as a particular configuration of literary form (how the message is communicated) and content (what the message is)...If the text makes its point in story form then we ought to seriously consider constructing a sermon that is faithful to the content and form of the biblical text.”¹⁸

Expository narrative preaching involves the utilization of literary skills and concepts to study the narrative texts of Scripture, and to present them in narrative sermon form. The principles of exposition must guide narrative preaching, so that the sermon is both a story and an exposition of a biblical text.

Sermons are both narrative and expository when they use the literary art to tell an inspiring story and expository principles to preach the biblical text. Narrative sermons that are expository are those that are prepared according to the same principles as an expository sermon of a biblical text in any other genre. “As with ‘regular’ sermons you must begin by identifying the subject and complement of the passage.... It is critical that you have thought your text through to absolute clarity.”¹⁹

¹⁷Richard Eslinger, *A New Hearing: Living Options in Homiletic Method* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1987), 127.

¹⁸Richard Jensen, *Telling the Story: Variety and Imagination in Preaching* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1980), 126.

¹⁹J. Kent Edwards, *Effective First-Person Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2005), 77.

The narrative is a unique form, but it also has features common to other, more direct sermon forms. Like other expository sermons, the narrative has a main idea. As in other sermon forms, sub-points support the main idea. “In a narrative sermon, as in any other sermon, a major idea continues to be supported by other ideas, but the content supporting the points is drawn directly from the incidents in the story. In other words, the details of the story are drawn together to make a point, and all the points develop the central idea of the sermon.”²⁰

The narrative sermon, prepared according to the principles of expository preaching is effective both in teaching truth and in inspiring the listener. Calvin Miller observes,

In Scripture, propositional truth tends to be instructional and stories tend to fall under the exhortative word “kerygma”. Propositions give you the information to build a life on, and stories motivate you to want to build such a life. When the best crafting of the narrative moment has been done, the people who hear it will have heard the truth in two ways. The text of the sermon-properly related to the narrative (insight, didache) will be theirs to take with them a long way into the future. And they will have felt the motivation to build a life on what they have just learned (kerygma).²¹

The above authors agree that the narrative Bible texts were written by authors who used the techniques of literary art, and that the proper preaching of narrative texts requires some basic knowledge of these techniques.

How does the literature of homiletics reflect the use of these elements and techniques of story in expository preaching? Is there a body of work in homiletics that is sufficiently developed to provide a basis for training in literary art and its use in preaching? What specific concepts of literary art could inform a course on narrative preaching? These are the questions considered here.

²⁰Ibid, 37.

²¹Calvin Miller, *Preaching: The Art of Narrative Exposition* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2006), 134.

Plot

The Creative Writer's Handbook points out that "plot" can be used as a verb – as in the case of planning the journey of a ship. "To plot a course means to design a route to a specific destination, including deciding each part of the course. By plotting a course in segments the navigator ensures that the ship will reach its destination."²²

The storywriter and the preacher plot the movement of the narrative in much the same way. The goal is to construct a course that takes the listener on a journey to the theme of the story through actions, characters, and feelings.

McKee echoes that plot is planned movement through events toward a climax.

A good story takes the listener somewhere. Plot creates movement from the initial conflict, the event that causes conflict. The interest of the listener is gained by an interesting setting and the initial conflict. At the start of the plot the attention of the listener is captured. The function of plot is to gradually increase the intensity of the listener's attention and emotion so that the mind and heart of the listener reach their highest level of involvement with the story at the point where the main idea is most vividly demonstrated.²³

Jensen summarizes the same material in his book about preaching. "Story has been defined as 'a sequence of events or images that employs plot, character and emotion. Plot gives it direction; character gives it humanity; and emotion gives it people in relationship.'²⁴

Robinson and Robinson provide substantive instruction in plot. Plot development may be chronological, unfolding steadily over time. Plot may also develop psychologically. Psychological development is defined as follows: "A narrative

²²Philip K. Jason and Allan B. Lefcowitz *Creative Writer's Handbook*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1997), 56.

²³McKee, *Story*, 28.

²⁴Jensen, *Thinking in Story*, 89.

constructed or relayed by a thought sequence rather than chronologically. Instead the story develops logically or according to another expected flow of thought.”²⁵

Robinson teaches that a story or drama has five sections to it:

- 1) Background, or the introductory materials.
- 2) Conflict, a complication or problem which leads to ...
- 3) Suspense leading to ...
- 4) Climax (or resolution of the problem) ending with a...
- 5) Conclusion²⁶

Robinson’s use of plot in sermon preparation shows how literary art functions in preaching. He teaches preachers to use a five-point plot structure, which leads the sermon from background, to conflict, through suspense to climax and conclusion. This is the same pattern that McKee teaches to screenwriters. McKee says the purpose of plot is “...to gradually increase the intensity of the listener’s attention and emotion.”²⁷ In a story sermon, the goal is similar - to accomplish the highest level of attention and emotional intensity at the very point that the main idea of the sermon is being most vividly communicated.

Using these terms: plot, conflict, suspense, climax, and conclusion, the preacher can develop clear and compelling narrative sermons. Each term is explained here.

Background

The background of the story includes the "who, what, when, and where." Also referred to as “Setting” this first section has a purpose. “At the start of the plot the

²⁵Robinson and Robinson, *How You Tell It*, 45.

²⁶Haddon Robinson, *Advanced Expository Preaching* (Spring: Denver Seminary, 1987), 35.

²⁷McKee, *Story*, 28.

attention of the listener is captured.”²⁸ Jensen uses wording similar to McKee regarding the storyteller’s task to create an atmosphere into which the reader enters. “To involve the listener in the story is achieved by the preacher’s work to ...create a world in story which is safe enough for people to enter, and yet powerful enough to involve the hearer in personal participation in words of judgment and grace. The aim of story preaching is experiential.”²⁹ Every story must begin with the listeners and their specific needs for information, relevance, and interest.

“The method of plot is to start where the listener is...”³⁰ Background gives the listener a map by which they can easily follow the events that are about to take place. Stories taking place in cultures and/or places unknown to the listener require some orientation. A story that is confusing or unfamiliar to the listener will frustrate and bore the listener. Background is also referred to as setting.

Setting is the context in which the characters live and function. It is both external and internal to them. Setting is the total environment in which the characters will live and function. Generally you use the word ‘setting’ in two senses. 1. To refer to a particular ‘somewhere’ in which the characters function – the kitchen, the palace, the street. That kind of ‘where’ has to do with scene. ...2. To refer to more than a space. Setting refers to the total environment of the story...cultural shadings, as well as physical landmarks and characteristics.³¹

Background (or Setting) can include:

Historical setting: The situation created by historical events occurring in the larger world at the time of the story. Cultural setting: Values and customs that the characters lived by.

²⁸Ibid, 29.

²⁹Jensen, *Thinking in Story*, 95.

³⁰McKee, *Story*, 28.

³¹Jason and Lefcowitz, *Creative Writer's*, 126.

Weather/Forces of Nature: Many stories are given with a description of weather, and the impact upon the people in the story, resulting in greater intensity of drama.

Relationships and Social Issues: The characters live in a network of social relationships and experiences. Love and hate, war and peace, unity and civil strife are all part of the setting of the story.³²

An effective setting is more than a backdrop to a story. It is not mere decoration or interesting facts about Bible lands. “An effective setting is intimately related to the plot because what happens to the characters could happen in the way it did only in that particular setting. ... Separate the plot from the setting and the story would not have the same impact and would not make the same kind of sense. The characters know they are somewhere and face particular events, therefore, the reader is more inclined to believe in and respond to their lives.”³³

The characters in the story must be worthy of the attention of the listener... In the book, “The Fiction Writer’s Workshop” character is part of the definition of plot. “A narrative of events which are consequential to the listener, involving human characters that are worthy of our attention and who change”³⁴

Author and writing instructor James Frey explains the interaction of various aspects of plot.

You do not have to lay out the setting in full detail at the start of the story. More often, you start with the basics, and let the travels and events of the characters reveal the setting cumulatively. The events of the story have an impact on the characters cumulatively. The key is that the writer needs to have researched and thought through the setting, and when the writer has fully pictured the place and the environment – that necessary sense of setting will permeate the story in many seemingly unimportant details. The reader will believe in the setting – natural or imaginary – precisely because the characters believe in it. In a good piece of fiction the reader feels the

³²McKee, *Story*, 28.

³³Jason and Lefcowitz, *Creative Writer's*, 125.

³⁴Ibid, 68.

feelings of the character, thinks their thoughts, and walks in their shoes. When characters are real the readers can meet someone and get to know them in depth, or can meet themselves in disguise, and live out and understand your passions. Writer William Sloane thinks it boils down to this ‘Tell me about me. I want to be more alive. Give me *me*.’³⁵

The Creative Writer’s Handbook tells the relationship between character and plot.

The reader can identify with the characters – because they share the same, real life hopes and fears, pain and potential. The characters are not necessarily good people, in fact all are flawed – otherwise they would not be genuine – since real people are flawed also...Once the writer creates convincing characters, everything else should follow easily, or at least naturally. Out of character plot grows.³⁶

In establishing the background the storyteller creates an atmosphere, a state of mind in which the reader has a sense of entering into the setting. The next step-conflict- starts the movement of the plot. Robinson calls conflict, “A complication or problem which leads to suspense leading to climax (or resolution of the problem)”³⁷

Conflict

The Creative Writer’s Handbook defines conflict as “Actions and tensions resulting from opposing forces set loose in the plot.”³⁸

Conflict refers to an event which occurs which moves the story into action. A tragic event may happen, or simply the danger of such an event may threaten. The key in Conflict is that something happens that creates a tension, a need, a hope, or fear –which precipitates movement in the story. Conflict is vital to any plot because of its ability to

³⁵Ibid, 34.

³⁶Frey, *How to Write*, 69.

³⁷Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 68.

³⁸Jason and Lefcowitz, *Creative Writer's*, 120.

gain attention and interest in the listener. Plot creates movement from the initial conflict, event that causes conflict.”³⁹

The narrative sermon has the power to grab attention and elevate the emotion and interest of the listener because conflict transports the listener into the story. In his book, *How to Write a Novel*” explains the power of conflict. “No listener can turn away until the conflict is resolved. Find something conflicting in a character, writing teachers tell us, for out of internal conflict issues behavior, tragedy. The writing of a story has been described as creating the world of the story in the reader’s mind, and the reader is “transported” into the story.”⁴⁰

Lowery demonstrates the same concept in reference to writing the narrative sermon. “The narrative sermon has power to grab attention and elevate the emotion and intensity of the listener because, properly done, it transports the listener into the experience of conflict.”⁴¹

Conflict can be defined as, “the problem the main character faces and the story is about how he will resolve it. The conflict includes the feelings and struggles the problem creates for the character.”⁴²

Navakovich, shows how conflict is revealed through the characters.

To show what makes a character, you must come to a crucial choice, which almost breaks and then makes the character. The make or break decision gives you conflict. Think of Saul on the way to Damascus; while persecuting Christians he is blinded by a vision; after that he changes, becomes Saint Paul, the greatest proselyte. Something

³⁹McKee, *Story*, 28.

⁴⁰Frey, *How to Write*, 89.

⁴¹Lowery, *The Homiletical Plot*, 200.

⁴²Navakovich, *Fiction Writer's*, 25.

stays the same, however; he is equally zealous, before and after. No matter what you think of the story of Paul's conversion, keep it in mind as a paradigm for the making of character.⁴³

Both the writer of fiction and the writer of sermons have the same work – to communicate themes through characters that reflect genuine humanity so that the story moves the listener. “Writers have to turn blood into ink. Preachers turn ink into blood”, says Robinson. “Research mixed with imagination brings a character to life”⁴⁴

Part of the exegesis of the text is the examination of the characters and their complexities, utilizing good hermeneutical tools and thoughtful reflection. Alter cautions preachers not to treat the people in the Bible as stereotypes. “The Bible characters are not simple...but are individuals, with multiple ironies artfully etched in their imperfections as well as in their strengths.”⁴⁵

Suspense

Suspense is the simple but effective tool of the storyteller in achieving the gradual increase of emotion in the listener on the way to the climax. The character faces a problem. He begins to resolve it, but the first effort he makes fails. Or the problem gets worse. This is suspense. When tension mounts suspense has been created.

When asked the secret of constructing plot one writer said “Get the poor guy up a tree, then throw rocks at him, then get him down out of the tree”⁴⁶ In this analogy the

⁴³Ibid, 138.

⁴⁴Robinson and Robinson, *How You Tell It*, 48.

⁴⁵Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 22.

⁴⁶Frey, *How to Write*, 20.

poor guy is the character, being up a tree is the conflict, and getting down is the climax and resolution. Suspense is when the writer throws rocks at him.

Davis states that a sermon can carry the listener along in its flow and progression of plot toward a destiny – and the sense of movement created by the unfolding events.⁴⁷

Climax

The Creative Writer's Handbook defines climax as, "...the highest point of tension in a plot. The reader is at the highest point of emotion. The characters are at the point at which things must change for better or worse."⁴⁸

Lowry refers to climax as resolution. "The journey from itch to scratch... The moving of story from disequilibrium to resolution."⁴⁹ Whether watching a movie or listening to a sermon, the audience is gradually led to the climax by the movement of the plot.

McKee explains, "The climax of the story is the resolution of the conflict. In writing a story, the author wants the reader to be drawn into an ever -increasing tension".⁵⁰

Edwards urges preachers to look for the elements of plot, and to identify the climax of the text. "Note how the narrator has strategically arranged the scenes of the story to gradually increase the intensity of the conflict experienced by the reader. Trace

⁴⁷Davis, *Design*, 20.

⁴⁸Jason and Lefcowitz, *Creative Writer's*, 45.

⁴⁹Lowery, *The Homiletical Plot*, 88.

⁵⁰McKee, *Story*, 28.

the increasing tension as it builds from scene to scene until it reaches an unbearable level. It is at this point of greatest tension when suddenly the tension of the story is resolved”.⁵¹

Conclusion

Sometimes referred to as “resolution”, the conclusion is the end of the story when the elements of the plot come together and tie up the loose ends. “The conflicting elements come together and the story ends. It is an epiphany, a sudden insight, when a character understands an important truth. Often it occurs at the climax of the story. “AH HA! Now I get it!”⁵²

More work in the use of the art of story in the field of preaching is developing. Recent books on narrative preaching by writers such as Torey Robinson, Kent Edwards, and Stephen Mathewson demonstrate how naturally the art of storytelling enhances the writing of narrative sermons.

Edwards skillfully integrates the task of exposition with the concepts of story writing. His work demonstrates how to blend the science of biblical interpretation and the art of narrative to achieve expository narrative preaching. The result is that the best of both worlds are preserved.

In the diagram below the underlined words are all related to exegesis and the bold words are all specific components of literary art. Edwards combines them effectively.⁵³

⁵¹Edwards, *Effective First-Person*, 4

⁵²McKee, *Story*, 28.

⁵³Edwards, *Effective First-Person*, 7

I. The Exegetical Task

1. Adjust the interpretive paradigm
2. Understand the larger context
3. Determine the **story's structure**
4. Analyze the **characters**
5. Discern the **setting**
6. State the Big Idea
7. Double check the big idea
- 8 Application

II. The Homiletical Task

1. Select the text (i.e. make sure it is an entire story unit)
2. Identify the big idea of the **narrative**
3. Develop the **protagonist**
4. Create **antagonists**
5. **Set** the story

The preparation of the narrative sermon moves from the exegetical task to the homiletical task, integrating storytelling concepts with expository principles throughout the process. Edward's work is an example of the integration of literary techniques with preparing the expository narrative sermon. Other homiletic scholars also provide examples of the usefulness of literary concepts and literary terms to understand and preach a narrative text. The example below is Fokkelman's analysis of the plot in Genesis 37. In the example below, he shows that the narrative biblical text is in the form of plot, and he uses the plot structure to interpret it.

- A 18 – 20 conspiracy by the brothers: kill Joseph!
 “ a savage beast devoured him!”
- B. 21-22 speeches by Reuben: no, throw him into the pit
- C. 23-24 action- brothers throw Joseph into the pit
- D. 25 a caravan passes by
- X. 26-27 proposal by Judah: sell Joseph
- D. 28 caravan buys Joseph
- C. 29 Reuben finds the pit empty, rends his clothes
- B. 30 speech by Reuben to his brothers and mourning
- A. 31-33 conspiracy – brothers deceive Jacob with the coat.

Fokkelman says that the planning of the story by the writer of Scripture is evident, and one can discern his decision-making in application of techniques of literary art.

There is not only linear progress, but also circular coherence, which has been made possible by the narrator’s grip on his material. He was able to develop this grip through his vision; I will start with the brother’s conspiracy against Joseph, and I will conclude with the mini-conspiracy they plan against Jacob by deliberately deceiving him with the coat. I can emphasize that by putting the fatal clause about the savage beast first on their lips, and then have the same words spoken by their father.⁵⁴

Two more examples of the use of literary art in narrative preaching are how Fokkelman handles elements of story in his study of Genesis 27.

Fokkelman on Point of View in Genesis 27.

A Note on Point of View – here the narrator takes the reader into his confidence and gives us information that Joseph and Jacob do not have “The reader notes that the sentence about the animal in v. 20 only has the status of an intention, that Jacob and Joseph are in the dark as to this (they do not hear it). And the narrator takes us into his confidence, so that we have the same level of knowledge as the brothers.”⁵⁵

⁵⁴ J.P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville, Kentucky: Deo Publishing, 1999), 117.

⁵⁵Ibid, 117

Fokkelman on Conclusion in Genesis 27.

At the conclusion, however, there is the surprise that, upon seeing the bloody coat, the father chooses the very words which, unknown to him (unlike us and the brothers), constitute the lie that the brothers planned to spread, or course in order to effectively hide their own responsibility. In verse 33 (Jacob concludes that Joseph has been devoured) “and the old man is steeped into unstemmable mourning which is to last many years. Meanwhile Joseph in his turn does not know what is happening at home; he has long since transported south as a slave...Through our prior knowledge, we know who is responsible for this cruelty.”⁵⁶

Fokkelman demonstrates a sophisticated use of literary terms and concepts. With this example, there is precedent for the use of story, and especially of intentional shaping of Scripture into story form. His exemplifies that the Scriptures do come to the world in the formk of literary device. It can be inferred from his work that there is validity in shaping the sermon in the same way. That is, to preach a passage structured as literary art, one may shape the sermon with the same forms and techniques.

Robert Alter calls for a greater attention to the literary art forms in the Bible as a necessary part of Bible scholarship. “By literary analysis I mean the manifold varieties of minutely discriminating attention to the artful use of language, to the shifting play of ideas, conventions, tone, sound, imagery, syntax, narrative viewpoint, compositional units and much else.”⁵⁷

Scholars and writers of homiletical literature demonstrate the skillful and effective use of the elements of story from the field of literary art. The literature of homiletics demonstrates the integration of the elements of story in preaching. In addition, the literature from writers outside the field of preaching indicates that instruction in literary art is useful narrative preaching.

⁵⁶Ibid, 80-81.

⁵⁷Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 22.

In summary, the literature reviewed above reveals that there is a significant body of work by homiletic scholars on the use of literary art techniques in narrative preaching, in both study of the biblical narrative texts and preaching in the narrative form. Based on the literature studied it may be concluded that the literature provides ample foundation for a course on using story-telling concepts to prepare narrative sermons.

CHAPTER IV

COURSE DESIGN

Introduction of the Course

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the design and content of the course in narrative preaching. It is a brief course in preaching narrative sermons intended to be used as continuing education for preachers. The emphasis is on the use of plot as a literary tool in the preparation of expository sermons in the narrative form.

The course is a study of the five sections of plot: setting, conflict, suspense, climax and conclusion. It explores the use of these five sections to understand narrative texts and to shape sermons. The course is designed as four modules of 50 minutes each.

This course is intended for people who have the responsibility of preaching. It is assumed that participants have basic training in expository preaching, or have completed homiletic classes that are in harmony with the principles of expository preaching described in Chapters One and Two of this thesis-project. The class is based upon the principles of expository preaching.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section will present intended outcomes of the course, including the performance expected of the students, the conditions under which they will perform, and the criterion for the measurement of student performance.

The second section contains the lesson plans for each module. All teaching materials used in the class including student notes, manuscripts of sample sermons, and forms are included in the Appendix at the end of this paper.

This course was taught to pastors of the Arizona District of the Church of the Nazarene at the annual meetings in August 2005, and again in July of 2006. Chapter Five reports on those experiences and includes insights gained and changes for future classes.

Section One: Instructional Outcomes

The course is designed to provide the student with three kinds of learning experiences: information regarding the definitions and concepts of narrative preaching, demonstration of techniques of narrative preaching, and participation in activities in which information and techniques are applied. Wherever possible, the course uses demonstration and participation in order to keep the student engaged in learning, and to provide opportunity for practice of narrative preaching skills within the limitations of a four hour course.

Students will watch demonstrations of brief narrative sermons; participate in class discussions and group work on the following topics: plot as demonstrated in sample sermons, an analysis of narrative sermon manuscripts, and the plot structure of narrative biblical texts, outlining narrative biblical texts, and using the plot of a biblical text to develop a sermon outline in the narrative form.

Module One: An Overview of Plot in Narrative Sermons

Goal One: By the end of this module, students will identify three out of five elements of plot in a class discussion.

Goal Two: The student will explain how the narrative sermon uses plot to involve the listener in increasing tension which resolves with the conclusion of sermon.

Module Two: A Closer Look at the Elements of Plot

Goal One: Student will identify the five elements of plot in the sample sermon.

Goal Two: The student will state a main truth from the conclusion of the sample sermon and explain how the other four plot sections contribute to that main truth.

Module Three: Using the 5 Section Plot Structure to Study a Narrative Bible Text

Goal One: The student will outline narrative Bible texts according to plot sections.

Goal Two: The student will state that every narrative Bible text has a main theme, and that the original meaning of the text must be reflected in the main idea the preacher develops for the narrative sermon.

Module 4: How to use biblical text to shape a narrative sermon

Goal One: The student will transfer all five plot sections from the Narrative Bible Text Form to the Narrative Sermon Outline Form.

Section Two: Lesson Plans

The lesson plans for each module are provided below. The four modules are described here to provide a brief overview for reference. Other materials used in the lesson plans are listed as they appear in the appendix at the end of this paper.

Module 1: “Preaching Stories as Sermons – An Overview of Plot in Sermons.”

What is narrative preaching? How does the story support powerful preaching?

Module 2: “The Five Steps of Plot in Your Sermon – A Closer Look”

What are the elements of story that make a narrative sermon work? How can they work to gain and hold the attention of my listener?

Module 3: “Using the Five Steps of Plot to Understand the Narrative Bible Text”

How does plot help me find the main idea of the text?

Module 4: “Using the Five Steps of Plot to Write a Narrative Sermon”

How can I write an interesting story without having to be a creative writer? How can a story sermon teach the Biblical text?

Lesson Plan: Module 1

“Preaching Stories as Sermons – An Overview of Plot in Narrative Sermons.”

1. Introduction

A. Demonstration of Sample Sermon #1 “My Name is Paul” 15 min

B. Discussion: Student reaction to the sermon –

Did it get attention? Teach the text? Hold interest? Relate to needs?

C. Definition of Narrative Preaching

D. Transition: This is a narrative sermon, a sermon in the form of a story. It has the power of a story and the qualities of a sermon. What makes that happen?

2. Explanation: An Overview of Plot in Preaching 20 min

A. Plot: The Movement of the Story Sermon – From Itch to Scratch

B. The Elements of Plot – Brief Definitions

C. Plot is Natural – You already use it –

Plot in Bedtime Stories, Classic Tales, Testimonies.

3. Exercise: 15 min

A. Distribute manuscript of Sample Sermon #1

B. Point out each plot section

Performance measure: Discussion: Have students answer questions about each

plot section: What information does the setting section provide to the listener.

(Example: who, what, when, where of the story.)

Repeat with all five sections of plot in the sermon.

Performance measure: As a summary of the module have students explain that the narrative sermon uses the increasing tension of plot to involve the listener in the sermon.

Conflict: What is the event that precipitates the story?

Suspense: What happens that complicates the conflict for the character?

Climax: What event is the highest level of emotion in the story? What event is the outcome of all the conflict and action of the story?

Conclusion: What does the story teach? What is the lesson to be drawn from the experience of the character?

Lesson Plan: Module 2

“The Five Steps of Plot in Your Sermon: A Closer Look at the Elements of Plot”

(A lecture on the elements of plot with examples from sample sermons.)

I. Read Sample Sermon #2

10 minutes

Excerpts from “The Woman Who Came a Stone’s Throw from Death”

By Nancy Hardin, in *Biblical Sermons*.

II. Elements of Plot: A Closer Look at Setting, Conflict, and Suspense 40 minutes

1. Setting: the context in which the story takes place- including all aspects of the characters’ lives: both external and internal. Setting includes: who, what, where, when, why.

Setting is the total environment in which the characters will live and function. Generally writers use the word ‘setting’ in two senses. 1. To refer to a particular “somewhere” in which the characters function – the kitchen, the palace, the street. 2. To refer to more than a specific space. It refers to the total environment for your story... cultural shadings, as well as physical landmarks and characteristics.

Examples of setting include:

- When: Historical setting: events at the time, dangers, and possibilities. Once upon a very specific time in which events were occurring those are part of the story, and necessary to understanding the story.
- Who: Characters: Relationships/Social Setting Introduce the people in the story. Ask yourself what this person was like. People have not changed much since Bible times.

- Where: Geographical Setting: Research the place they were in, and describe it in the story
- Weather/Forces of Nature: Many stories are given with detail of weather, which intensify the emotion, and meaning of the story.

An Example of Setting in Sample Sermon 2

Hardin creates a well-rounded, interesting setting. The listener is briefed about where this journey starts, and our attention is engaged by the emotional questions raised. There is a physical description of the town, a cultural explanation of the Festival and Hardin's view of the moral problems there. There is a cultural setting "People from all over Israel gathered in the capital city of Jerusalem to celebrate the most joyous of all the feasts-the Feast of Tabernacles."

Are you as a listener drawn into the story by the setting? How?

An Exercise:

Setting is what prepares the listener for the story. To check your setting, ask the following questions: Does this setting give the information needed to follow the story? Are the main characters introduced? Is the location identified? Is there explanation of culture or laws or any other important parts of the story that my listener would not know? Does this setting inspire interest and get the listener's attention? Does it introduce an idea that something has happened or is about to happen?

The second step in the plot is the event or problem that starts the action in the story. This is called "conflict".

2. Conflict: The event that precipitates action, the problem that occurs early in the story that starts changes. Sometimes referred to as “the precipitating event” the conflict is the event that changes what was happening in the setting. The narrative sermon has power to grab attention and elevate the emotion and intensity of the listener because, properly done, it transports the listener into the experience of conflict.

Example: Conflict/Precipitating Event in Sample Sermon 2

Hardin says, “At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery”. Hardin quotes the text, and this introduces the characters. The “who” question of narrative technically should be under “setting” but it is part of the precipitating event so it works here too.

We could say that the conflict – in this case an event – is the statement “they brought in a woman caught in adultery”. It is the event that changes the scene from Jesus teaching while people listened, to Jesus needing to take action in response to what the Pharisees did. And I think that is what Nancy Hardin is doing.

“As they entered the temple courts, they saw a small group sitting around Jesus. He was sitting among them explaining the Scriptures, but they didn’t hesitate to interrupt the lesson”

I like the way Hardin gives a few sentences to explain the motives of the Pharisees. By not hurrying past that she gives us more information, and she stirs up in our hearts some feelings of righteous indignation.

“Casting the exposed adulteress into the midst of the group, they demanded, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” vv 4-5”

“They seemed legitimately concerned about immorality, but in verse 6 we learn their real intent in seizing the woman “They were using the question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing Him. They had plotted “Look, why don’t we catch Jesus between his love for the rabble and His regard for the law? If he chooses this woman, the crowds will begin to question His teaching. If he chooses the law, he’ll lose his following.”

Here Hardin clarifies the situation. The conflict between the Pharisees and Jesus occurred because they were plotting against Him. She does a good job of making sure we know it, and giving us a chance to absorb it, and it intensifies the story.

“This young woman was their pawn. It didn’t matter to the Pharisees whether this young woman was stoned to death or not. The life they wanted was Jesus’. That was the mood as they dragged her before Jesus that morning.” More stuff about their motives – not just information, it is prosecution. “They did not just ask a question and wait politely – they hurled questions at him like stones.”

Hardin uses good, concrete style. The woman was a “pawn”. The Pharisees didn’t “oppose” Jesus; they “hurled” questions like “stones”. In a few words Hardin keeps the tension, and gives us more visual experience. Being a brilliant creative writer is not necessary. Using concrete terms, describing the scene, and a bias for action always makes a good story.

Note the transition to the next step – suspense. “What a scene! Who was this woman? How was she caught in adultery, in the very act?” The question takes the intensity of the story up a step – the power of plot is that it increases intensity of the story with each step.

3. Suspense is a second event, or realization, that increases the tension created by the conflict/ event. Sometimes called the secondary event – the conflict was the first event, now the “something else” happens to make the conflict even more difficult, frightening, and exciting.

Example: This Bible story is intense because it has multiple steps that increase the tension – they bring in the woman caught in adultery – an event full of intense emotions on its own. It carries feelings we all have – embarrassment, shock at seeing the woman. What was it like to watch a fellow Israelite thrown down for judgment like that?

In identifying the conflict, and suspense sections of this plot, we find that there are several kinds of events that create conflict and suspense. The challenge of the Pharisees- a conspiracy to oppose Jesus – raises the intensity. Jesus’ reaction to the challenge is also suspenseful – because He doesn’t seem to react at all – like a cool headed sheriff refusing to be goaded into a fight by the evil gunfighter. Hardin creates suspense in the way she just describes that.

Of all the things to do He writes in the dust. What? Who does that? It is suspenseful in part because it is silence – and silence is not what anyone is used to – especially in a debate. Silence. Here is another increase in intensity. He stands and gives them the “zinger” that makes us stand and cheer inside - “Sure, we’ll stone her, fellows. We just need one little thing – a sinless person to start the execution.”

The Pharisees can’t answer. He bends down – eyes away from them – ignoring them. More silence. Are you picturing this confrontation? We are – because Hardin is sticking with telling the story – visual, concrete, action – and that is plot. We are listening because we want to know what happens next.

I almost chose this as the climax because winning a fight with the forces of evil by a good verbal response is what I think of as a high point. And it is a higher level than the previous part of the story. But I think the climax is really what happens next, when Jesus speaks with the woman. Two reasons for that view – 1. The woman's future and her standing before God is more climactic than Jesus facing down a Pharisee, something he could do before breakfast – as He does here I think. Reason number 2 that this is probably not the climax is that there is too much story left. We want the five points of plot to be distributed fairly evenly across the text.

So what does it mean? This story has several “beats” in it – a beat is a point of change, or increase in emotion or drama. We could say that the suspense, or beat, occurs several times.

Note: Don't worry about getting all your elements of plot identified “correctly”. There is room for your own judgment here. It is more art than science. But there is an issue of science- the correct thing to do with a narrative sermon is to identify where the text goes – its main idea – and how it gets there. If you set the listener up to be able to follow the story – that means a clear setting, and you bring them in on the events that happen; leading to a climax, then you can be confident your sermon is a good representation of the plot in the Bible passage. You and I may list a different section for suspense for example – but as long as we follow the movement of the text, and communicate its main theme within the sermon- we are safely within the principles of expository preaching.

4. Climax (Also called Crisis) the highest point of tension in a plot. The listener is at the highest point of emotion. The characters are at the point at which things must

change for the better or worse. The conflicting elements come together and the story ends. The story resolves.

An Example of Climax in Sample Sermon 2

The Pharisees had to leave – Hardin says that Jesus had exposed them. The climax is the point in a story where something has to happen – there has to be a finish, a resolve to the emotional problem. “The characters are at the point at which things must change for the better or worse.”

Hardin tells this story from the third person – she is a narrator outside the story. But she is handling it with the focus on the woman and she does that because the text does. Hardin keeps the story focused on Jesus, but she does so by using the story of a woman in the condemnation of sin being forgiven by the Lord. All teaching about Jesus Christ has something to do with how He affects people. So this is a valid approach to the story.

“As the last of the religious leaders left the temple court, Jesus slowly straightened up and faced the woman for the first time.

“Woman where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

“No one, sir.”

“No doubt she was bewildered. She knew she was guilty – there was no other plea. She was guilty. Surely she was due some punishment. The only one qualified to stone that woman that morning was Jesus. He was without sin. He could have stoned her – but He didn’t. He said, “Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.” Vv 10-11

Hardin must have asked herself the magic question: “What would that have been like for that woman to go through all this?” She certainly uses human hopes and fears to

make this story immediately relevant to us. What entered the woman's heart at that second? Hope. Light. Relief. All of that.

Remember we said that climax could be a character having an insight into the truth of the story. The person says, "Ahha! Now I get it!" This is an Ahha for the woman – and should be brought out in the conclusion for the modern listener. This story stuff works because the same thing the woman felt- we feel, and our listeners feel. Is there hope for me to be forgiven?

Hardin sees it and brings the message to us. Actually she brings us to the message.

5. Conclusion: The elements of plot are brought together, and the storyteller ties up the loose ends, giving the main idea, summarizing the theme and its meaning to the listener. Often the preacher may simply state the idea and exhort the listener to application of the main idea.

"He said, "Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin." Vv 10-11

Hardin concludes with the big idea, in sermon form. "When the light of the world shines his spotlight on your soul, you have a choice in the way you'll respond. Like the Pharisees you can go on in darkness. Like roaches, you can flee from its brightness. Or, being exposed before him in your sin – you may listen carefully to the words He spoke, because He speaks them to you also. Whatever your sin He says "I do not condemn you – write you off as hopeless. Go now and leave your life of sin. If you respond to Him in faith and trust in this word of forgiveness, you can walk in the light without fear."

Her statements show the original idea of the text – "Jesus forgave a sinner, when the Pharisees had a case for her execution." She takes that truth from the text and shows how it applies beyond that time and includes more than just that woman.

“If you respond to Him in faith and trust in this word of forgiveness, you can walk in the light without fear.” Hardin closes with a timeless truth stated in a manner which is clear and memorable.

Conclusion of Module 2

If every story in the Bible follows a pattern how should we approach the study of narrative texts? We should look for the 5 elements of plot.

Study is seldom easy – often difficult- but there is a difference between good old-fashioned hard work, and frustration. The elements may not always be obvious, but they are there in some degree, and if you know what to look for you can usually get the Bible study phase done and know you have a pretty good grasp on the story – including its main idea.

Module 3: Lesson Plan: “Using the 5 Steps of Plot to Understand the Bible Text”

(Materials: “Narrative Bible Outline Form” Student Notes page 26)

1. Introduce Module: The Elements of Plot in Your Study of the Narrative Bible Text

Do you ever find it difficult to outline your sermon? You read a Bible text, and you study it, and you find some really great truths in it that bless you. Then you say “How do I say that in a sermon?” I think all preachers find that to be tough. When you hear someone preach a text and they have a really clear outline and a practical application – do you ever jot it down and use it? You should! Give credit of course. Why are we, as preachers, so interested in good outlines? The answer is because outlines – the shape of a sermon, the structure, is a big part of the job of writing a sermon.

In 26 years of preaching I believe that the topic of the next two modules has been one of the most important, helpful concepts I have learned. I use it all the time, and it has made my study time more effective and my sermons both more accurate and more interesting to the listener. Use these 5 elements of story as your “Outline”. Fill them in and your sermon is well on its way to completion and effectiveness.

The starting point in writing a narrative sermon is the study of a narrative Bible text. The trained preacher knows that to understand a Bible story – a passage of Scripture in the narrative genre – one must understand the elements of plot in the text, and how they fit together. Discovering the elements of plot in a Bible text is what allows us to learn the meaning of the text. (This is where we find the theme or main idea of the text.) Studying the plot of the Bible text also gives us a “boost” on writing our sermon outline – the structure of the Bible text can serve as the shape of your sermon. In other words – discover the outline of the Bible story and you have the outline of the narrative sermon.

Remember that we have said that every story has these five sections of plot. They

might appear in different forms, or described by other terms by other texts or teachers. There may be more than 5 sections. There are different styles of writing and some writers use sections of plot in other ways to suit their purposes. But every story has these five sections of plot- in some form – and that includes every Bible story. Every Bible story has these five different steps that come together to form a plot and communicate an idea. (Let's look at that one thought at a time – first – Every bible story has these five sections of plot.

Exercise: Using the Bible Text Outline Form Plot an Outline of Noah's Story

(Materials: "Narrative Bible Text Outline Form" Students Notes page 27)

Discussion of Genesis 6.

Turn in your Bibles to Genesis 6. This is a familiar story, so we can think through the story in terms of plot. We will also identify those verses in the story that represent each section of plot. In this way we will outline the Bible text, as we would for any text we are studying in preparation for preaching.

1. Setting – The information that the listener needs to understand. (Examples: who, what, when, where)

Genesis 6:5-8

Noah was a righteous man living in the ancient world, and he loved God when no one else did. It was a horrible, violent dark time on the earth. There was no official government or police force to protect the innocent, no constitution, and it was a morally and spiritually dark time. Noah is living there with his children and grandkids, and he loves the Lord.

2. Conflict – Also known as the precipitating event – The conflict is what happens that moves the story into action- This conflict or event moves the characters from passive,

everyday life into some kind of action (can also be a threat or goal that moves the characters to consider action etc). Genesis 6:9, 13, 6:14-22

One day God shows up and says, “I am sick of all the sin and I regret making mankind. I am going to destroy everybody on the earth – except you. And I want you to build an ark.” So we see the conflict – Noah moves into action.

Transition: Next is Suspense

3. Suspense: 100 years of a difficult project in an evil, opposing world. Noah was 500 years old at the start Genesis 5:32 and 600 when the flood came Genesis 7:11.

Note: we see that Noah is building an ark – a giant ark – in a land that has no rain – that can’t be easy. We know that it takes 100 years – that can’t be easy to stick with either. What must that have been like? God has already said that the whole world is unbelievers – so Noah is the only person in the world serving God– that has to be a heavy responsibility. He is watching his friends who are lost – For me that takes the story up a notch emotionally. What must it have been like for Noah? I can imagine that he must have had times when he wanted to quit.

(Remember, research with imagination brings the Scripture to life. Solid research will show you things that are interesting and exciting. Take a minute to ask – “given what I know about the story from the Bible text and from commentary studies, what must that have been like for the person in the story?”)

With all this going on the listener wants to know what is going to happen – how will this work out?

4. Climax - After 100 years of challenge and faith everything God said would happen, happens exactly as He said it – Noah’s faith is proven, His perseverance is vindicated. The impossible task was completedThe huge structure actually was built

6:22. The impossible round-up of the animals happened – 7:8, 9 ‘they just came to Noah.’

The rain came to a land that had never known rain 7:12. The climax is that after all these years- living with this lonely, seemingly crazy task, becoming isolated from a sinful community, all the pain of knowing that everyone is going to die – after having heard that he has to load every species of animal in the boat. How? One day the rain falls, the earth splits open and water gushes forth, the ark door slams shut, closed by God’s own hand. The wind howls, and everyone except Noah and his family drowns.

I chose this as the climax because it is a high point of emotion of the story for me. That is a dramatic moment. After the climax comes the conclusion

5. Conclusion

The promised covenant was fulfilled. The meaning of the story is found here. If the flood is the climax, then the conclusion is what follows that in the text.

After the flood- we see that everything God said was going to happen actually took place. “I will save you by this ark.” He does it. That is the conclusion. The ark comes to rest, they disembark, and there on Mount Ararat God meets with them and promises that He will never flood the earth again, that they are to repopulate the earth, that the animals are going to repopulate the eco-system, Everything is to be restored – it’s a new start. That is the main idea – and the main idea of the story comes in the conclusion.

Summary of Module 3

Step One for preparing a narrative sermon is to plot the text using the 5 elements of plot. Use the five-point plot structure as a guide to your study – filling in the blanks on the form with whatever your study reveals. Don’t worry about how good or how bad it may look to you. This is the exegetical phase – not the sermon phase. Ask questions and

look at the commentaries – seeking only to educate yourself about the text. At the end of this phase you will have a five-point outline of the text in the form of a story. This outline will be a complete summary of the text, and a general idea of the main theme. In Module Three we will look at how to use the plot structure of the Bible text as the material for a narrative sermon.

Module 4: Lesson Plan: The Power of Plot: From the Page to the Pulpit

“How to Use the Biblical Narrative Text to Shape a Narrative Sermon”

I. Introduce Module: Using the structure of the text to shape the sermon outline

After you have the five points of the Bible passage and the main idea of the passage the next thing you do is write your Big Idea – your main idea for your sermon.

This is what we did talking about writing your sermon idea from the timeless truth

Three steps to exposition- original meaning of the text (the story of God saving Noah) the timeless truth (God delivers from judgement), Now we have to take one more step – we have to come up with the idea of my sermon: the homiletical idea.

I already know the idea of the Bible text – so the hard part is done for me personally – Now I need to form the idea for my sermon. Warren Wiersbe prays “Lord, give me your word for your people on your day”.

II. Demonstration: Transfer the information on the Noah story from the Bible Text form to the Narrative Sermon Form.

Explain: Main idea as conclusion – guides the rest of the sermon

Explain: Sub-points

CHAPTER V

THE TEACHING EXPERIENCE

This course in expository narrative preaching was taught on two occasions – the 2005 and 2006 Annual Meetings of the Church of the Nazarene/ Arizona District. It was presented as a four-session continuing education class for ministers with preaching responsibility. At the time of this writing the course has been scheduled for presentation to a class of 10 missionaries of the Evangelical Free Church at a retreat in Rome, Italy in May 2007.

The purpose of this chapter is to report on the teaching experience. This chapter will address the actual outcomes of student performance in each module, and possible changes in the course in the future.

There are two major differences between the two courses. The first is that the 2006 version presents a smaller amount of material, in an effort to teach a few concepts well, rather than presenting too much material poorly. The second difference is that the 2006 version uses less lecture material, and more demonstration and participation. The result was that the 2006 students were more attentive and energetic for the entire four hours, and performed better in the course outcomes. These are presented below by Module.

Analysis of Achievement of Outcomes

Module One: Outcome One - Students were to identify the five elements of plot in a class discussion. To achieve this outcome, students were shown a demonstration of plot in a sample narrative sermon. Then they were given instruction in plot, supplementing the

lecture with printed definitions of the five sections of plot. Then the instructor led a class discussion on the sample sermon and the sections of plot. Outcome: Achieved. Students were able to identify three out of five elements of plot in the discussion on the sample sermon.

Module One: Outcome Two -Students were able to explain that the narrative sermon uses plot to involve the listener in increasing tension, which resolves with the conclusion of sermon. Students were also expected to be able to explain the significance of the angles of the diagram and the progression of the sections of plot from setting to conclusion. Students were given a copy of the Robinson diagram of the sections of plot, and the instructor explained how plot uses movement, increasing tension from setting to conclusion.

Module Two: Outcome One: Students were able to correctly identify one aspect of the “setting” are used in the sample sermon from the list provided (historical, social, geographical, cultural, or weather) Most students were able to offer an opinion as to an appropriate verse to use as the Conflict/Precipitating Event for the sample sermon.

Module Two: Outcome Two - Regarding the Conclusion in the Sample Sermon, the student will discuss the following questions: Does the conclusion include a main theme? Does it accurately reflect the meaning of the text? Does it draw together the events and problems of the story and give a main truth? Outcome Two Achieved: All students engaged in the class discussion on the sample sermon.

Module Three: Outcome One: The student will contribute to class exercises in outlining Bible texts according to plot sections in discussions facilitated by the instructor. Outcome One: Partially Achieved. Most students had difficulty with contributing to the

exercise. Those who did participate said they had more experience in preaching. The majority agreed that the exercise made sense as the instructor demonstrated, but that they did not know enough to offer input.

Module Three: Outcome Two: Students responded according to the stated outcome will be able to state that every narrative Bible text has a main theme, and that the original meaning of the text must be reflected in the main idea the preacher develops for the narrative sermon.

Module 4: Outcome One: Given a demonstration by the instructor the students were able to transfer all five plot sections from the Narrative Bible Text Form to the Narrative Sermon Outline Form. All students participated in the class discussion, building a narrative sermon outline based on the exegetical outline.

Possible Changes for Future Classes

This class was presented in 4 consecutive sessions in one afternoon. In future, it would be better to present the course over two days with two sessions per day. The active style of lessons –using demonstrations and class interaction – kept the energy level of students up for the first two sessions. The energy level in the second two sessions was acceptable but not optimal. Having the course over two days would improve this. The plan for the upcoming class is to increase the time from four hours to six hours, and to add 1-2 sessions of practice in developing plot based outlines in class discussion and small groups, and question and answer.

Presenting the material in four consecutive sessions did not allow students time to take the material and work on their own. Having it over two days would allow time for

students to work on the process themselves, and to come back with questions.

In addition, it would be beneficial to provide students with reading material prior to class. Many of the concepts could be understood through reading, and students would come more prepared to ask questions and try different applications of the concepts.

APPENDIX

A Course in Expository Narrative Preaching: Student Notes

Module One: What Is Narrative Preaching? Definition of Narrative form

“Narrative sermons – not using stories as illustrations, “The narrative sermon, rather than containing stories, is a story from outset to conclusion.” Miller

Narrative preaching reveres the authority of the Scriptures in study of the text and the development of the sermon. In narrative preaching sermon form is derived from the form, movement, and structure of the passage.

Narrative Bible texts include factual accounts and fictional lessons. Factual accounts include such events as the history of the Nation of Israel, accounts of Jesus’ miracles, death, and resurrection. Fictional lessons include parables of Jesus.

Narrative texts reveal to us God’s invisible truth in visible ways, making that which is inaccessible to our senses accessible by means of the imagination and those same senses. Narrative texts are intended to provoke obedience as well as evoke emotion, and narrative preaching should balance the two.

Exegesis of the narrative text involves a constant movement back and forth between the biblical world and the contemporary world of the preacher. Therefore if the preacher is skilled in biblical studies, the need may be to grow in the interpretation of self and culture. On the other hand, the person who brings to preaching a deep interest in the contemporary situation may need to develop skills related to biblical interpretation.

The Narrative text

What constitutes a unit of thought in a narrative text? A whole story. The limits of a story, where it begins and ends, are determined primarily by analyzing the plot. Stories typically contain exposition a crisis, a resolution, and a conclusion.

Plot

The internally consistent, interrelated pattern of events that move through time to shape and design a story. Plot is the writer's choice of events and their design in time

All plots have one purpose: to put the characters in motion through arranging the events, emotions, etc. so the reader can follow them, and desires to follow them to a convincing, meaningful end They involve us in the fate of the characters because the elements that make up the plot (the events in the lives of the characters) connect the character to our world.

Plot includes some form of organization of the story in this general pattern:

A conflict or conflicts

Complication of those conflicts (suspense)

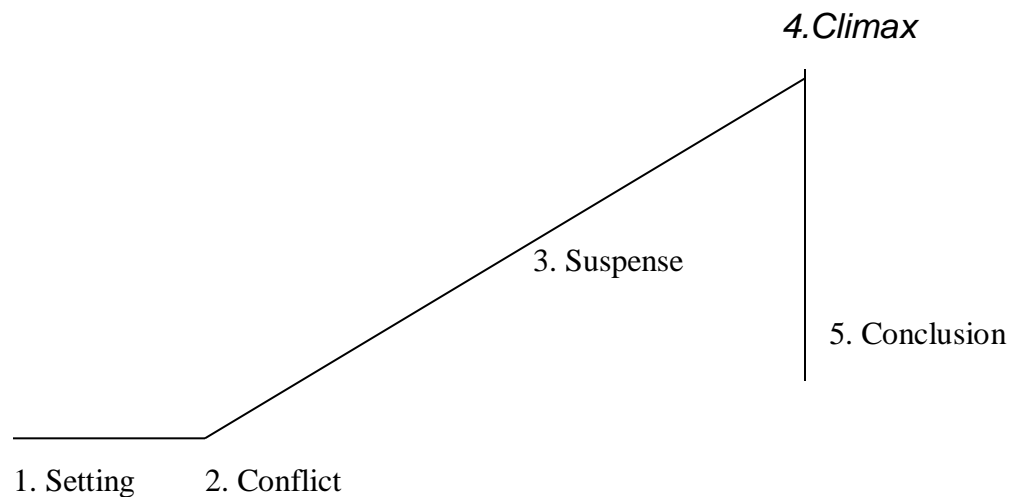
A resolution of the conflict

Expository Preaching and the Narrative Sermon

This course is designed to help you preach expository sermons in the narrative form. Expository preaching is defined as follows: The communication of a biblical concept derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.

There are three steps to preparing an expository sermon, and they apply to narrative sermons as well:

1. Exegete the original meaning of the passage using sound hermeneutical principles
2. Distil the idea of the passage into a timeless truth, not restricted to a single time or culture.
3. Develop that timeless truth into a homiletical idea that speaks to the listener.



Robinson's Illustration of Plot Structure

Brief Definitions of the Elements of Plot

1. **Setting:** the context in which the story takes place- including all aspects of the characters' lives: both external and internal. Setting includes: who, what, where, when, why.
2. **Conflict:** Also known as "precipitating event. The event that precipitates action. A good setting will get your listener into the roller coaster and buckled in. A good conflict/precipitating event will get the coaster moving, carrying your listener on attention, emotion and a need to know what happens next.
3. **Suspense:** A second event, or change in circumstances, or realization of change which increases the tension caused by the conflict, sometimes called the secondary event. Plot has been described as "First get the guy up a tree. Then throw rocks at him. Then, get him out of the tree." In this illustration, conflict gets the character up the tree. Suspense would be the thing that makes his situation worse – throwing rocks at him.
4. **Climax:** Also referred to as crisis, climax is the highest point of conflict in the plot. The character is at a point at which things must change – for better or worse. The conflicting elements come together and the action concludes. The story resolves.
5. **Conclusion:** The elements of the plot are brought together, and the storyteller ties up the loose ends, giving the main theme of the story. The ideas of the story are summarized and a meaning is given to the listener. The character may have an insight into the main idea of the sermon and say, "Ahha! Now I get it!" or the

narrator may make the statement. Often the preacher may simply state the idea and exhort the listener to a specific application of the idea.

Module 2: The Five Steps of Plot in Your Sermon: A Closer Look at Plot

1. Setting: the context in which the story takes place- including all aspects of the characters' lives: both external and internal. Setting includes: who, what, where, when, why.

Setting is the total environment in which the characters will live and function.

Setting is more than a specific space. It refers to the total environment for your story. It includes cultural shadings, as well as physical landmarks and characteristics.

When: Historical setting: events at the time, dangers, and possibilities. Once upon a very specific time in which events were occurring that are part of the story, and necessary to understanding the story.

Who: Characters: Relationships/Social Setting Introduce the people in the story.

Ask yourself what this person was like. People have not changed much since Bible times.

Where: Geographical Setting: Research the place they were in, and describe it in the story

Why: Cultural Setting: The values and customs are often vital to understanding the story.

Weather/Forces of Nature: Many stories are given with detail of weather, which intensify the emotion, and meaning of the story.

Setting is what prepares the listener for the story. To check your setting, ask the following questions: Does this setting give the information needed to follow the story? Are the main characters introduced? Is the location identified? Is there explanation of culture or laws or any other important parts of the story that my listener would not know? Does this setting inspire interest and get attention of the listener? Does it introduce an idea that something has happened or is about to happen?

2. Conflict: The event that precipitates action. It could be a problem that occurs early in the story. This is what makes the action begin. It could be a problem, an opportunity, or a tragedy. The narrative sermon has power to grab attention and elevate the emotion and intensity of the listener because, properly done, it transports the listener into the experience of conflict. No listener can turn away until the conflict is resolved. It may be a conflict inside the character, or outside.

In literature the conflict takes one of several forms.

Man against man, man against nature, man against himself or man against God.

3. Suspense

Definition: Suspense is a second event, or realization, that increases the tension created by the conflict/ event. Sometimes called the secondary event – the conflict was the first event, now the something else happens to make the conflict even more difficult, frightening, and exciting.

In identifying the conflict, and suspense sections of this plot, we find that there are several kinds of events that create conflict and suspense. Suspense is intended to take the conflict and add emotion and interest. There is a problem to solve, but any immediate solution is prevented or cannot be thought of.

A beat is a point of change, or increase in emotion or drama. We could say that the suspense, or beat, occurs several times.

4. Climax

Also called “crisis”, it is the highest point of tension in a plot. The listener is at the highest point of emotion. The characters are at the point at which things must change for the better or worse. The conflicting elements come together and the story ends. The story resolves.

6. Conclusion:

The elements of plot are brought together, and the storyteller ties up the loose ends, giving the main idea, summarizing the theme and its meaning to the listener.

The character may have insight into the main truth of the sermon and say “Ahha! Now I get it!” or the narrator may make the statement. Often the preacher may simply state the idea and exhort the listener to application of the main idea.

Plot is a natural part of human thought and communication – you use it all the time!

Bedtime Stories

1. Setting: “Once upon a time there was a girl called Little Red Riding hood
2. Conflict: “And one day her mother sent her to her grandma’s house, with the instruction not to talk to strangers...”
3. Suspense: “The wolf questions her, races ahead, disguises himself as grandma...”
4. Climax: “The wolf leaps from the bed, chases the girl, at the last minute is shot by the hunter.”
5. Conclusion: Grandma and Little Red are rescued and we all fear strangers.

Classic Tales

1. Setting: “My name is Ishmael. I am a young man who works on a whaler with a bunch of colorful characters.
2. Conflict: The captain offers a reward for the sighting of the whale that ate his leg
3. Suspense: The captain's obsession with the white whale endangers the crew

4. Climax: Captain Ahab attacks the whale – is killed and the ship is sunk – I nearly drown.
5. Conclusion: a caution against obsession with revenge – it can cost you too much!

Testimonies

1. Setting: I was raised in a Christian home but got away from the Lord
2. Conflict: One day I was offered drugs and I accepted
3. Suspense I became addicted and nearly lost my life and family
4. Climax: At the end of my rope I wandered into a church and found a new start
5. Conclusion: Whatever you are going through, God forgives and restores His children.

Module One: Sample Sermon

First Person Narrative Sermon “My Name is Paul”

Setting: (Saul of Tarsus begins adult life as a devoted teacher of the Law)

My name is Paul – though many knew me as Saul of Tarsus. Raised in a devout religious home, I studied hard and became a teacher of God’s law and a defender of the faith of Israel.

I was devoted – I strove for perfection – the complete fulfillment of the law. I could not tolerate the constant shortcomings of human nature when it came to divine law. But if I resented imperfection in others – I secretly hated it in myself. For if I could have been honest I would have to admit that I could not keep God’s law myself- and I could not understand it - or understand why I was so weak.

I thought that if I could only understand the law – every word of it, then I could master my own life. And if I could teach it clearly then others would change their lives. This was a daunting challenge and it took all I could muster to try it – and not to quit.

Conflict: (Saul discovers the threat of Christianity and sets out to oppose it)

As if this was not sufficient torture to my soul I heard of a movement that followed Jesus of Nazareth – a heretic, a blasphemer – to me he was just another false messiah, posing as God’s messenger – and these fanatics were liars leading God’s own people astray.

Before the death of Jesus Gamaliel, the great leader and my teacher – once said of Jesus, “If He is from God we cannot oppose Him. If He is a heretic, He will be found out, and the people will leave Him. We won’t need to dirty our hands with him.”

It was believed that Jesus had been proven false – yet though He had been tried, condemned and crucified people still followed His Gospel, believing Him to be their divine King. His teachings His claims, all were in violation of the laws and traditions I lived for- and yet the entire nation seemed caught up in it.

I saw a grave danger – the people who followed Him claimed he had been brought to life by God, and the number of followers grew as the story spread. I saw this movement as a cult, diluting the law of God and corrupting the hearts of His people. I resolved to do all I could to end the movement Jesus of Nazareth had begun.

At first it was a rational and obvious decision – Before I met any of these people I feared only their false teaching – and on that basis I decided that the only path was to take legal proceedings against them – and the law called for punishment.

But I was surprised – as I began to arrest and interrogate some of them – to observe them in person – my heart twisted inside me – in cold envy of their joy, their inner peace. Their lives were not perfect, they claimed no such perfection, and they did not attempt the false piety of cult members. Their lives were genuine – honest about imperfection – and their character cast a harsh glare upon my own sin.

About this time Stephen – one of the original 12 disciples of Jesus – was arrested. He was surrounded, and amidst a crowd – was stoned to death. I was there. I watched. I supported his murder. When you live in darkness of the soul you eventually stop looking for light - and you even begin to hate anything that causes light. Steven died with the light of God in his face, and I could not stand it. The only refuge I had from the condemning light of God's Spirit was my own hatred.

I became enraged, and my campaign for truth became an assault from my own sinful violence.

Suspense: Saul becomes a violent persecutor of the church using all available resources.

I was coming into my own as a teacher of law, and I had the respect of the leadership of Israel. I was like a lawyer or politician in your world, rising through the ranks. Young enough to have the energy and passion for exploits to defend Israel, and also experienced enough to gain the support of the power brokers. I obtained letters authorizing me to move freely across the country, without interference from the Sanhedrin its guards, or the local Roman authorities – who were happy to have me eliminating any kind of uprising among the people.

My anger boiled into obsession with arresting as many men and women- and bringing them in chains to Jerusalem to be punished for following Jesus. I surrendered to the anger – I breathed hostility, and threats blew from me like smoke from a funeral pyre. And so it was that I locked up many, many of my fellow Jews – I didn't care about their age or place – I would lock up young and old - young parents, grandfathers and grandmothers- the law made no distinction – and I would not have cared if it had. And I always voted for the death penalty at sentencing.

I hated them – maybe I was punishing myself – In the court I would try any trickery, any intimidation to get them to blaspheme God – But they were not subject to fear and hate. They forgave; they suffered with grace and courage – though they never seemed to be trying to be brave. They died quietly, peacefully perfection in their peace – My rage grew. I pursued them in every city I could. Then I set out for Damascus...

Climax:(Saul meets the Jesus He has persecuted.)

I was traveling with personal assistants- they were there to keep records, issue warrants. And there was a garrison of Temple guards who were supervised by Roman

soldiers at each city. I thought nothing could stop me. My wrath would be quenched. At about midday I had just turned to speak to an assistant when suddenly we were silenced by the sudden blaze of intense white-gold light from heaven itself.

A light whose rays were brighter than sunlight – my eyes would not stay open. It covered us and blotted out the trees around us, and our entire party froze – we had to – we could not move, and even if we could – we were unable to see the ground in front of us – or the man standing a yard to the side And in our shock we fell face down in the dust of the road.

It was then I heard it – a voice- His voice – the voice like the roar of many waters in a crashing, stormy ocean. It thundered so loud, and was so intense that I felt its percussions in my chest. Though its sound was indescribable the words rang true and clear in my aching ears. It was the divine voice – it was another world colliding with my own. Yet- in all its glory – the voice also had the sound of flesh and blood, of pain as well as power, of suffering as much as of sovereignty. And it cried out to me, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?”

I wept for fear of its power. I wept in sympathy for the echoing depths of sorrow in that voice. It was as though the One who spoke had himself known the lashes of the whip, the separation of mothers from children. It was like He had borne all the sorrows I had caused – but known them more deeply because they were inflicted on His children. I felt my body shake with sobs, and it took several attempts before I was able to gasp enough air to call out, “Tell me, who are you Lord?”

A silent second, and then a sound of trumpets split the air – I am Jesus whom you seek to destroy, whom you injure. I am Jesus.”

Jesus? Jesus! My brain became an empty brass chamber, with the sound of the name ringing back and forth through my stunned consciousness, louder, as my ability to think slowly returned – and then the terrible realization. How stupid! I saw it in an instant- the prophets I studied, the writings of Moses I preached – all proclaimed Jesus as Messiah.

Time passed – minutes or hours I could not know. The sound calmed, the wind ceased. I was blind – because I was proud. My rage now replaced by sickness – the sickness of sin and the sickness of the realization of sin. And I broke – I plead mercy with a broken heart.

“Lord. I will do anything – What would you have me to do?”

My pride and my goal of perfection were suddenly too heavy – and I released it to Him who had spoken. I waited. What would He say? Nothing? I thought so – because there is nothing a sinner like me can do – When you suddenly know you are guilty – there is nothing left for you. But I was wrong.

“Go” He said. Jesus called “Go”. Somewhere in my black heart, in my wicked, despairing, cringing soul some small flamed flickered with hope. He had told me to go- so my life was not over. Not ruined.

I would go anywhere – do anything to be redeemed from my evil past. Could there be hope?

“Go into Damascus and it will be told to you what you are to do.”

Go? Yes I will go! Yes I will go! I rose to my feet, and immediately crashed to the stony ground. I was in a night as dark as His presence had been bright. Lost, I tried again and called to my companions. They had to lead me like a weak child. Their leader now blind, helpless and so we entered Damascus.

How could I go forward? – I had been given the most important order of my life – and I could not even walk down a road without help. But I chose to believe what Jesus had said, “It will be shown what you are to do.” And I believed.

Conclusion: Paul discovers forgiveness for sin, and a purpose in life through Jesus

I waited in Damascus – and I began to pray. I made my room, my blindness a temple of prayer and soon a man named Ananias came – God had spoken to him about me – Ananias knew about me – about my persecution of the church – and yet he came and he said “Brother Saul, “He took me as a brother, accepted me. He said, “Brother Saul, The Lord Jesus has sent me so that you might receive your sight and be filled with God’s Spirit.”

Until that moment I had been looking into blackness –not just in my eyes, but a lifetime of blackness in my heart. But he spoke to me, and I lifted my eyes to him, and the haze fell away like – like scales dropping to the floor, I saw his face – I saw my life – and I knew that Jesus had accepted me.

Then Ananias continued “God has appointed you to be a witness for him to all men- of all you have seen and heard.” I was freed from the past. I was given a future I arose from there and was baptized.

You may be a Paul – trying so hard to get past your own guilt. You may be hurting so badly you don’t even know that your anger, your resentment – against others is actually sin in your own heart. Jesus has the same message for you – “Stop fighting Me – I am the one who gave my Life for you. I have a future and a hope for you. Repent and humble yourself – listen to me, wait for me and it will be shown to you what you are to do.”

You have a future with God. You are no worse than a murderer like Saul – yet Jesus desires to be your Lord.

I believed – having been broken I found my heart strangely healed. Having had my world shattered, I found my spirit was made whole. In the moment where my confidence in myself was stripped away I found peace.

Sample Sermon Two – by Nancy Hardin

A Woman Who Came a Stone's Throw from Death John 8:1-12

Main Idea: This story demonstrates that Jesus was God and that in the midst of moral darkness, he was the light filled with grace and with truth. This story, in its own way, declares a great deal about Jesus and the Father who sent Him.

I think I know why this story is included here. If no one else understood him that day, if no one else saw his light, one woman did. It has always been true, I think, that the folks who have two strikes against them have a clearer understanding of who Jesus is than people who think of themselves as home-run hitters.

In this story the woman is exposed. These religious leaders bring her sin to light and cast her into darkness. Jesus deals with the darkness of her sin, but she comes to see the light.

1. Setting:

People from all over Israel gathered in the capital city of Jerusalem to celebrate the most joyous of all the feasts-the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast commemorated God's gracious dealings with His people. So at harvest time each year, the Jews came together in Jerusalem to give thanks to God for their blessings. But as often happens with religious holidays observed year after year, the Feast had become for the average Jew a week-long bash, devoid of much significance. It's the same with our great holidays, isn't it? For most Americans Thanksgiving has become merely a day for sumptuous eating and football games. The Feast of Booths represented for many people a week of revelry, drunkenness, and debauchery.

It is here that our story takes place-at the end of a weeklong carnival in the city of Jerusalem. As dawn broke that day, one particularly curious group came to the temple.

“At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. What a scene! Who was this woman? How was she caught in adultery, in the very act?

2. Conflict

The text calls her merely “a woman caught in adultery” She is not a prostitute. I tend to think she was just a young woman who had given up her virtue too easily. The text indicates she was guilty of adultery, so she was probably married. Her husband may have been away on business. Perhaps she went with friends one night to a party and danced into the late hours of the evening. There she met a man who would take away her loneliness. For the first time in weeks she felt attractive, energetic, and happy.

Of course we can only imagine what happened, but we do know from the text that in the early morning hours they entered a world of their own intimate affair, surrounded by a curtain of darkness. However, as daybreak burst over the hills of Jerusalem, there came with it a sudden exposure. Passing through the cluttered streets on their way to the temple, a band of Pharisees and scribes spied the entwined couple through the loosely tied branches of the booth. They grabbed the young woman from the embrace of her lover.

Startled and confuse, she clutched her garments to cover herself. The man was gone. Seeing the religious robes of the Pharisees he had bolted off down an alleyway. She begged the men for mercy, but they dragged her into the street. Questions flooded her mind as she fought back hot tears of humiliation, and anger. How could he leave her alone? Why had the religious leaders singled her out in the crowd? What would become of her now? How could she ever face her husband?

3. Suspense:

As they entered the temple courts, they saw a small group sitting around Jesus. He was sitting among them explaining the Scriptures, but they didn't hesitate to interrupt the lesson. Casting the exposed adulteress into the midst of the group, they demanded, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" vv 4-5

They seemed legitimately concerned about immorality, but in verse 6 we learn their real intent in seizing the woman "They were using the question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing Him." They had plotted "Look, why don't we catch Jesus between his love for the rabble and His regard for the law? If he chooses this woman, the crowds will begin to question His teaching. If he chooses the law, he'll lose his following."

This young woman was their pawn. It didn't matter to the Pharisees whether this young woman was stoned to death or not. The life they wanted was Jesus'. That was the mood as they dragged her before Jesus that morning.

They did not just ask a question and wait politely – they hurled questions at him like stones. What would happen with this snare planned for Jesus?

4. Conclusion

To the Pharisees the woman was an object. She was "Exhibit A" in their little fake trial. But to Him she was much more – a hurting sinner – a person who stood before them in shame and humiliation. He did a strange thing – He stooped over and began writing in the dust. You can imagine what the Pharisees thought, "We have Him stumped! He doesn't know what to say. He's buying time."

One thing becomes clear as we look on that scene. In stooping over to write in the dust, Jesus takes the eyes of the crowd off that woman, shuddering in bitter shame, and draws the attention to Himself.

What was He writing? We'll never know, the text doesn't say. Some think he wrote on the ground the sins of each one of the accusers. Hypocrite, liar gossip, dishonoring of parents... He would have known their sins. It's possible that's what He wrote on the ground. His delay angered them and they insisted, "What do you say then, man? Shall we stone her?"

He straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him cast the first stone." V 7b And having said that, He stooped down and wrote in the dust again.

The Pharisees had paraded themselves before the people as morally superior bastions of holiness. They could tell you everything that was wrong with everyone else, and everything right about themselves. There are still people today who do that.

We can see that attitude in our own lives. We criticize politicians for corruption and cheat on our taxes. We tell about someone's gossiping, and never realize we are gossiping about their gossip. The sins we perceive in others may blind us to the sin in our own lives. We can be so angry at others sins that we are ready to pick up stones, only to be brought up short when we hear Jesus say "If any one of you is without sin let him cast the first stone."

That's all he had to say. No sermon. No long indictment. A single sentence. Then he went back to writing on the ground.

5. Conclusion

"At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first..." v 9

Stunned by Jesus' words and snared by their own trap, the Pharisees and scribes filed out, leaving the woman behind them. Their test had backfired. When Jesus shone His light upon their lives, they were exposed, as no better than the sinners they used their laws to condemn.

As the last of the religious leaders left the temple court, Jesus slowly straightened up and faced the woman for the first time.

“Woman where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

“No one, sir.”

No doubt she was bewildered. She knew she was guilty – there was no other plea. She was guilty. Surely she was due some punishment. The only one qualified to stone that woman that morning was Jesus. He was without sin. He could have stoned her – but He didn't. He said, “Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.”

Vv 10-11

When the light of the world shines his spotlight on your soul, you have a choice in the way you'll respond. Like the Pharisees you can go on in darkness. Like roaches, you can flee from its brightness. Or, being exposed before him in your sin – you may listen carefully to the words He spoke, because He speaks them to you also. Whatever your sin He says “I do not condemn you – write you off as hopeless. Go now and leave your life of sin” If you respond to Him in faith and trust in this word of forgiveness, you can walk in the light without fear.

Module 3: Narrative Bible Text Outline Form

Text: _____ **Story of:** _____

1. Setting, Relevant Verses:

2. Conflict/Precipitating Event, Relevant Verses:

3. Suspense, Relevant Verses:

4. Climax, Relevant Verses:

5. Conclusion, Relevant Verses:

Main Idea:

Module 4: Narrative Sermon Outline Form

Introduction: (Complete last)

1. Raise a need:
2. Main theme:
3. Introduction of Story

I. Setting:

A. Exegesis of relevant verse: (from Narrative Text Form)

B. Involve the listener:

C. Transition:

II. Conflict/Precipitating Event:

A. Exegesis of relevant verse: (from Narrative Text Form)

B. Involve the listener:

C. Transition:

III. Suspense:

A. Exegesis of relevant verse: (from Narrative Text Form)

B. Involve the listener:

C. Transition:

IV. Climax:

A. Exegesis of relevant verse: (from Narrative Text Form)

B. Involve the listener:

C. Transition:

V. Conclusion:

(Complete first)

A. Exegesis of relevant verse: (from Narrative Text Form)

B. Repeat Need

C. Apply Main Idea

Annotated List of Recommended Reading

- Borden, Paul. *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*. Duduit, Michael, Editor. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1992. A library of sermons and sermon analysis in a single book. Narrative sermon articles are limited, but the material that is there is worth it. This book combines the art of the story with the science of accurate Bible exposition.
- Davis, Grady. *Design for Preaching*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958. A standard work every preacher should own. Grady has a passion for preaching, and was an advocate of story preaching in 1958. He argues that we under-use the narrative form and calls preachers to trust the story text.
- Edwards, J. Kent. *Effective First-Person Biblical Preaching*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2005. One of several excellent recent books on narrative preaching. Edwards's outstanding strength is the comprehensive "step-by-step" instructions in writing a narrative sermon. This book is only about first-person sermons, but his explanation and guidance with narrative preaching fits third person also. Includes good instruction on studying the text, without losing the focus on literary technique in homiletics. This should be the textbook for the new generation of seminarians studying narrative preaching.
- Fokkelman, J.P. *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide*. Louisville, Kentucky: Deo Publishing, 1999. This work is substantive. It is of the highest academic quality, and though it is not as much of a "how-to" as other books, the academic concepts Fokkelman teaches about literary art in the Scriptures are clear, and useful to know.
- Mathewson, Steven D. *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002. This is another recent work on the subject. Like Edwards, Mathewson is committed to expository preaching in narrative form. Although it is about Old Testament Narrative, his explanation of the topic is

applicable to narrative preaching in general. Like Edwards, Mathewson explores the process of sermon preparation, and provides great direction on how the structure of the narrative text should guide the shaping of the sermon. His handling of Old Testament material is inspiring.

McKee, Robert. *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and Principles of Screenwriting*. New York, NY: Regan Books, 1997. McKee is a successful screenwriter who also has a great gift for teaching about his art. His explanations of character, scenes, plot and high quality writing are an easily understood work, even for non-professional writers, like preachers.

Robinson, Haddon W., and Torrey Robinson. *It's All in How You Tell It: Preaching First-Person Expository Messages*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2003. This is a totally practical guide on first-person preaching. Highly recommended. This book tells you everything about the practical side of first-person preaching, down to the question of costume or no costume. This does not mean it lacks substance. All the foundation in expository preaching is present, as would be expected from Haddon Robinson. Torrey Robinson does a great job of sharing his knowledge and enthusiasm with the reader

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VITA

Clint Ayers was born April 9, 1960, in North Platte, Nebraska. As the son of a preacher, Rev. Ron Ayers, Clint learned about preaching by observing his father and other preachers. He is also the descendant of a long line of preachers, dating back to his ancestor, Rev. James T. Ayers (born 1815), a preacher during the Civil War. The extended family held preaching in high regard, and it was common practice to for the family to discuss preaching at meals and family gatherings.

His interest in dramatic preaching was shaped by training in the performing arts. From 1974-1977 he attended University High School in Normal, Illinois, a special school operated as a teaching laboratory by Illinois State University, where classes in all aspects of theatre were taught by university professors. He completed every course available in theatre, and competed in speech and drama at the state level.

At age 19 he surrendered his career plans and his future to the Lord in prayer, and experienced a call to preach. He enrolled in Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, Illinois, in 1979 and earned a Diploma in Theology/New testament Greek from in Chicago in 1982. He also studied at Western Bible College where he received a Bachelor of Sciences degree in Biblical Studies in 1983. He graduated with a Master of Divinity from Denver Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary in 1987, and a Master of Arts in Counselling from Ottawa University in Phoenix in 1998. He studied for the Doctor of Ministry in Preaching at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary from 2003-2005, and his expected graduation date is May, 2008.

